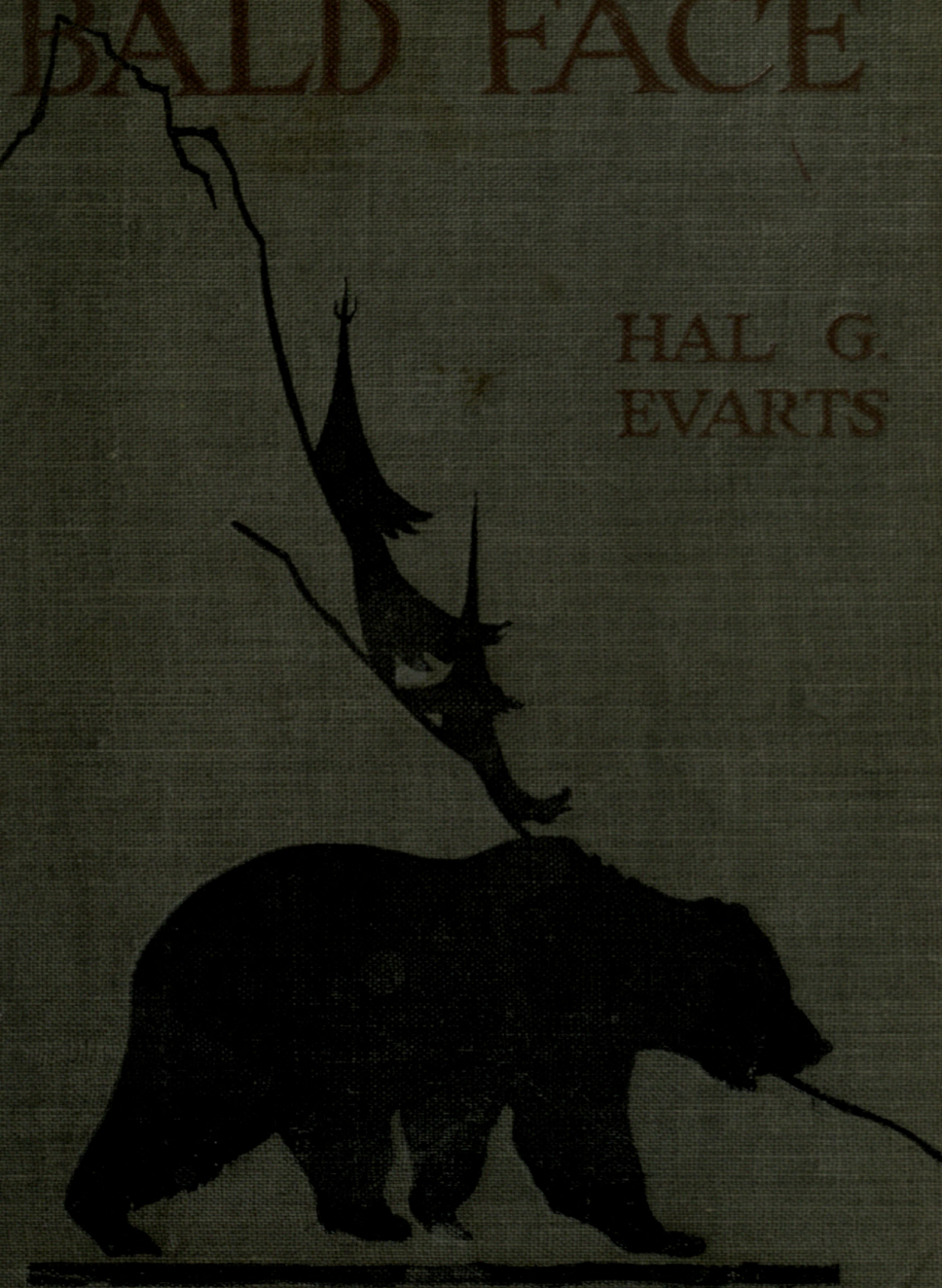
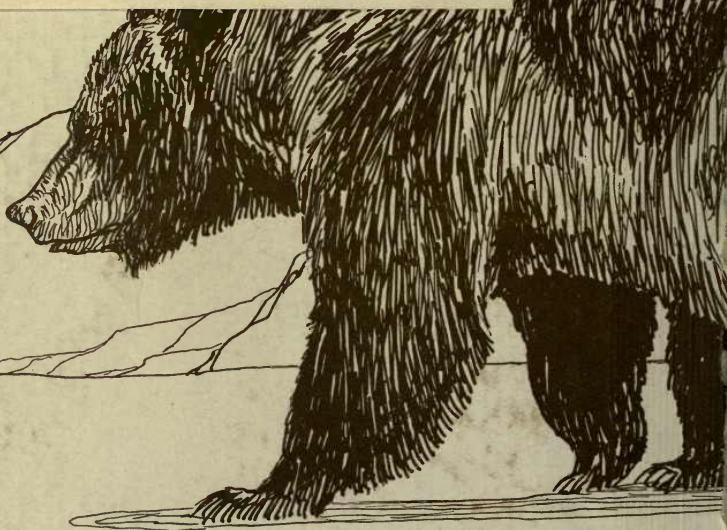


The BALD FACE

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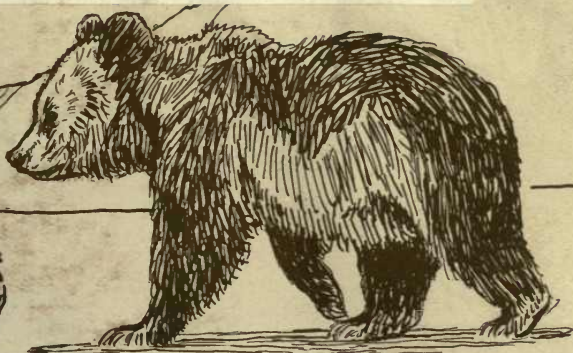






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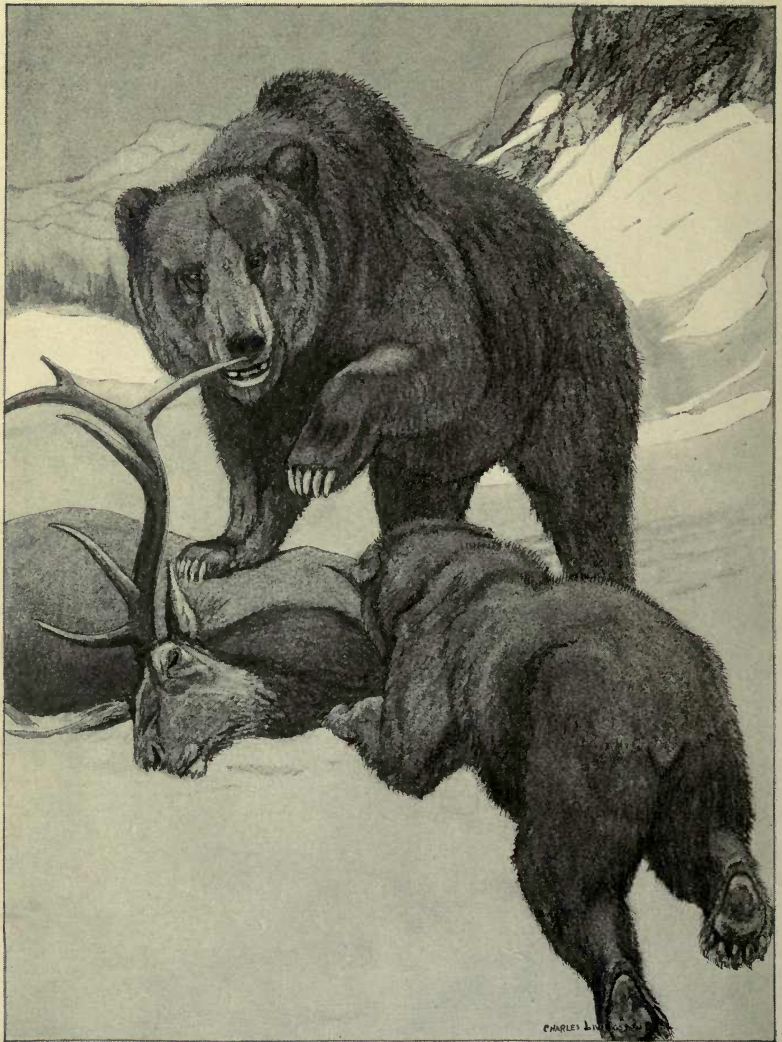


THE
BALD FACE



BOOKS BY
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THE BALD FACE
THE CROSS PULL
THE YELLOW HORDE



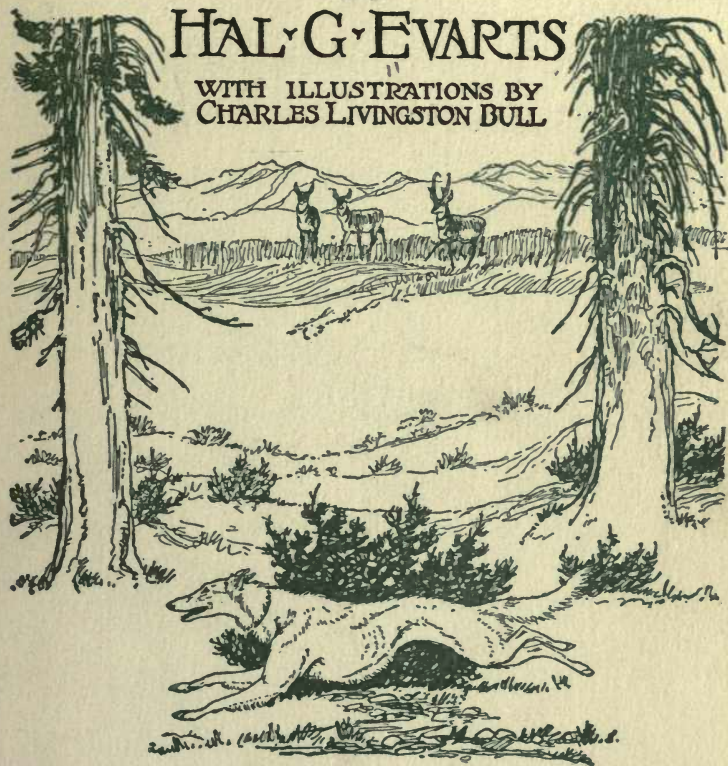
"He charged headlong, and the big silvertip calmly knocked him thirty feet." [THE BALD FACE—page 25.]

THE BALD FACE

AND OTHER ANIMAL STORIES

BY
HAL G. EVARTS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL



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Nat. Hist.

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THE BALD FACE



HE Blackfeet of the low country and the Shoshones who peopled the head reaches of the river nourished a century-old grievance which hinged upon one point—Tumwa, the grizzly. The Blackfeet held that Tumwa, the yellowish-brown

grizzly, Saka-Tumwa, the silvertip, and Logo-Tumwa, the baldface, were three different kinds of bear, while the Shoshones had it handed straight down from Manitou, their revered god and ancestor, that they were but three different color phases of the same beast. It was a fact well known to both tribes that when any bear was killed in his winter den it was found that his stomach was shriveled into a solid rubbery knot. Agreed upon the fact, they differed as to the cause.

The Blackfeet insisted that the bear gorged enormously prior to entering the long sleep of hibernation and that the stomach contracted for the purpose of extracting the last ounce of nourishment from the food. Pakatan, head medicine man of the Shoshones, let it be known to his people that the bear fasted for the last few days before denning. The stom-

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ach having nothing to keep it distended, the natural consequence was that it shrank.

There was but one way in which to settle this dispute; and in the time-hallowed manner in which all peoples before or since have adjusted their grievances, so the Blackfeet and Shoshones prepared to settle this. They painted for war.

The legends of those who keep no written records but instead pass history from generation to generation by word of mouth are apt to become a trifle distorted as time goes on. The white men knew this and when the last of the Shoshones told the first of the whites that the big tracks had always been seen in the hills since their forefathers first came to the headwaters of the river the white men, knowing that the Shoshones had lived there for perhaps a thousand years, were inclined to doubt. But knowing too that the grizzly lives a long life, perhaps even longer than man, and having themselves seen the great prints, the white men were prepared to admit that the monster silver-tip had been leaving his tracks in the hills for some time. In reality he made his first tiny tracks in the melting snowdrifts when he followed his mother from the den on the very spring that the hills first echoed to the war whoops as two mighty nations battled over whether he should later go to sleep with a full stomach or on an empty one.

He was a lone cub and his mother had gone into the winter in good shape. Bears vary greatly in size at maturity—as do men. The Shoshones knew from

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Manitou that the condition of the she bear when she dens in the fall predetermines the eventual size of the offspring who come forth with her in the spring.

But Logo, the bald-face cub, did not know that the great god Manitou had so prearranged things for him, and if he had known he would have cared but little. It was sufficient for the moment that he could enjoy the delights of the open sidehill after the months in the gloomy hole, its opening blocked by feet of snow, in which he had been born the size of a squirrel and had grown to the proportions of a badger without ever a glimpse of daylight. His mother did not seem hungry and ate only a few bitter twigs and blades of grass before retiring once more to the mouth of the den, where she slept for a day and a night.

Even at this early age Logo gave indisputable evidence of what he would be at maturity. His shoulder blades slid up and down under the loose skin when he walked and gave him a lurching, swaggering air. He had not the timidity of the young of other beasts. In his veins flowed the blood of a thousand generations that had trod the forest ways before the bark of the magazine gun had been heard in the hills—and every living thing had given trail. Only when tired or hungry did he return to his mother to sleep beside her.

A new note roused him from one of these fitful naps. He could not locate its source. It seemed to fill the whole expanse of the hills, borne on every breeze. He sat on his haunches and cocked his head

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sidewise as he listened to a distant drone that swelled and receded, rose again, but never died.

Far below on the banks of the Stinking Water a thousand savage throats were chanting the birth song. A plaintive wail issued from the tepee of Striking Eagle, chief of all the Shoshones, and the chant rose excitedly. Leonona, squaw of Striking Eagle, had brought forth a child.

There was a strange mark upon the infant's breast. Pakatan was with the child and the chant swelled in volume as the rumor spread that very soon now he would interpret the meaning of this queer sign for his people. There was the silence of death as Pakatan threw back the tepee flap and stood before them. He paused impressively before speaking, then violently struck his breast.

"Mighty warriors of the Shoshones," he then began, "Manitou has sent us a proof of his children's wisdom over that of the braggart Blackfeet! Upon the breast of the infant chief is a mark the meaning of which is as dim to you as the trail of the trout in the streams, but to Pakatan it is as plain as the tracks of the bull elk in the snow. The mark is the sign of the bear! The grizzly, the bald-face and the silvertip are cunningly blended in the one sign, proving them to be the same. The son of Striking Eagle shall possess the qualities of all three. There will be a cub with a white face and pelt of shining silver born of a yellowish she grizzly. As surely as the young chief shall live to rule all men, so shall the cub live to rule all the bears

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of the hills until such time as men with faces as pale as the forehead of the bald-face and natures even more fierce shall come to the banks of the Stinking Water. The son of Striking Eagle will live to know many of the white men and at last will come one with the courage, strength and beauty of the silvertip and he shall find our maidens even more lovely than his own. His blood will mingle with that of Shoshone chiefs.

"The young chief's reign will accord with that of the grizzly king. When the great bear dies, then shall the chieftain be called to Manitou—but not until three days after the passing of the bear, one day for the grizzly, one for the bald-face and one for the silvertip."

Pakatan paused in his flow of barbaric eloquence. Then:

"Manitou wills that the child be named Tumwa-Ka-Tin, Three-Bears-In-One, and thus throw the lie in the teeth of the Blackfeet dogs."

The chant rose and swelled in a frenzied tribute to the infant chief and the volume of it rolled off across the hills. Far up on a spur of the Wapiti Mountains, Logo, the bald-face cub, placed his forefeet on his sleeping mother and growled back defiantly across her at the sound.

This roused the old bear and she rose and left the den. She returned to it no more, but lingered in the vicinity for some time, eating increasing quantities of grass and bitter twigs each succeeding day. Then she headed down across the hard packed snowdrifts

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of the spruce slopes toward the lower valleys. At frequent intervals she raised her nose and sampled the wind. Logo, emulating her example, also elevated his little muzzle and sniffed. The second day of their forest travels the wind bore an odor that was delicious. The exercise of the past few days had stimulated a desire for some other form of nourishment to supplement that furnished by his mother. The grass and bitter twigs had relaxed the old bear's intestines until she felt capable of relishing solid food. They headed straight into the wind and came at last to the remains of a winterkilled elk and feasted with satisfaction upon this ancient relic.

The old bear's feet were tender from long disuse. She lingered near this first find of the season, bedding down near by and returning frequently to feed.

Logo's education progressed with each new day. He sprang from a race of thinking animals. Combinations of sights, scents and sounds were stored as facts in his busy little brain. Also tastes, for in addition to holding the world's record for sleeping and fasting the bear is the free-for-all champion eater of the universe. His menu is as varied as that of most other animals is limited and as a direct consequence his sense of taste is as sensitive as that of other animals is dull.

Logo's sense of smell was the most highly developed, but the Shoshones had been told by Manitou that this wonderful nose was but for the purpose of

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detecting new morsels of food to tempt the palate. And Manitou must have spoken truly, for no single new object caught Logo's eye but what he tested its edibility with his nose. The fact that his fare now consisted almost exclusively of meat did not affect his continual sampling of all else. The rich meat was somewhat concentrated, so he ate quantities of elk hair, grass, pine needles and shreds of bark for roughage.

As the wind shifted the old bear changed her bed. Day after day the wind bore straight from the elk to her and kept her informed of all that transpired there. She waddled forth and warned off each new intruder. From this Logo knew that the elk belonged to them. All things moved aside for his mother.

Once sure of this Logo appointed himself custodian and undertook to drive off all comers who would feed there. It was great sport to chase black and brown bears much larger than himself. On the third day the wind spoke of an alien presence and he rushed forth to find a great he grizzly enjoying his first mouthful. He gave one startled grunt and moved off before the cub's puny rush, casting many an apprehensive glance behind him.

Logo swaggered as he returned to his mother, his back roach bristling and a growl rumbling in his throat. He knew now that he was indeed a terrible fellow before whom all other living things gave trail. He had no slightest doubt but that was his own personal prowess which they feared.

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The old bear's stomach was distending rapidly and the net increase in the amount of each succeeding meal was marvelous. At the end of a week the elk was but a pleasant recollection, and Logo followed his mother on in search of more. Her pads had now toughened and she fed but once or twice at a spot. For a month they shifted back and forth, scouring the hills for the remains of the winter-killed and hauling the refrigerated carcasses from the drifts.

In one deep pocket they found the last resting place of a dozen elk. Here for the first time Logo learned that others were sometimes permitted to share the neighborhood of their own choosing.

Two grizzly families fed in the pocket. It surprised him that his mother did not drive them off. Instead, when he showed symptoms of clearing the field himself the old bear flattened him with an admonitory forepaw. The tap was no gentle one, and he desisted, not from fear of the beasts before him but from certain knowledge that he would once more feel the weight of her paw—the one thing on earth he had discovered to be more powerful than himself and consequently the one thing which he respected.

Logo concerned himself with facts alone, the reasons for the facts being immaterial to him. One fact was apparent. His mother did not wish him to drive these others off. He decided to let them stay, but behind this decision was a reservation to the effect that they had best look out for him. The old she grizz-

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lies were inclined to be friendly, and each mother kept a wary eye upon her own offspring lest they precipitate such widespread trouble as to draw their elders into difficulties.

A she grizzly with two cubs fed upon an elk near the one selected by Logo's mother. One was Tumwa, a brownish-yellow cub; the other was Saka, a handsome little silvertip.

In less than an hour after his arrival Logo started off upon one of his rambling excursions. Halfway between the two elk he came face to face with Tumwa exploring among the pine needles between two drifts. Logo looked back to make sure that his mother was not watching him and bore valiantly down on Tumwa.

Tumwa, having a brother, was already an experienced fighter. Every day he had a number of lively brawls with Saka. A horrible shock of surprise flooded Logo as the brown cub instead of fleeing for his life whirled and met him with tooth and claw. Tumwa cuffed him with his forepaws, trampled him with his hind feet and bit his ear almost simultaneously.

Logo was roughly handled before he recovered sufficiently to protect himself. But he came of a stanch breed and it never once occurred to him to give back an inch. He returned blow for blow, his one consuming desire that of retaliation. They raged all through the timber, cuffing and hugging and slamming against rocks and trees. Their feet churned the surface of the oozing spring drifts to slush which soaked their fur as they rolled in it. Logo grew very tired and would have

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stopped except that there is no such thing as quit in the composition of a young grizzly, that quality coming only with the experience of age and even then only in the shape of mature judgment.

It was Tumwa who led the way to settlement of the dispute. He too dealt only in facts, and he was well aware of one fact of which Logo was ignorant. This fight differed from Tumwa's daily bouts with Saka only in the one detail that he was somewhat less well acquainted with Logo. It was a positive certainty that when these rows lasted too long his mother intervened. He knew that the time limit had been reached and was apprehensive of feeling a sudden numbing stroke of her paw. She raised her head and looked in his direction—and Tumwa simply ceased hostilities. Logo administered a few finishing cuffs before he discovered that Tumwa was no longer on the warpath.

Tumwa turned over a few pine needles with his forepaw and shoved his nose among them as unconcernedly as if nothing at all had happened. Logo descended from his perch on the drift and buried his nose beside that of Tumwa. He had learned a new fact. Old grizzlies, with the exception of his mother, were perfectly harmless. They knew his prowess and fled from him. With grizzly cubs it was different. They were the only living things with courage to face him. Tumwa was a fighter after his own heart. He decided that the brown cub was a fine fellow—a stanch warrior like himself, and he had great respect for his late antagonist.

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They lingered in the pocket for a week and he had frequent bouts with both Saka and Tumwa.

Then he learned still another fact. He saw their mother discipline both cubs. He was forced to revise the fact that big grizzlies were harmless. It was somewhat confusing. Some old bears could inflict harm upon some young bears, yet all old bears could not inflict harm upon all young bears. This was very curious. He had no knowledge of relationship upon which to base it. There seemed to be no set rule in this matter. From its very haziness he sensed that this was but a part fact. But he stored that part away in his keen little brain, even though he could not know that other parts so stored in the future would eventually piece out the whole.

At the end of a month carcasses were harder to find and the straight carrion diet was beginning to pall. They varied the menu with the larvæ of insects under rocks and in rotten logs, tearing the latter to shreds in their search. They ate bushels of wild onions and other bulbous roots. Logo nipped off many different varieties of tender buds with the same relish as browsing animals such as the moose and deer. He gorged on green grass and enjoyed it as thoroughly as the grazing elk, and no otter in the streams was more fond of trout than he. They ranged on the open sidehills and he burrowed tirelessly for a ground squirrel or a nest of mice.

There was one animal, the porcupine, which he did not understand and about which he was therefore

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curious. He spied one of these quill hogs before his mother scented it, the wind being at her back. When the strange beast merely squatted down some distance ahead instead of giving trail Logo bristled with rage. His mother noticed the roach rising along his spine and looked up to see what it was all about. She gave a startled grunt and as Logo made the first forward lunge of his rush she reached out for him with her forepaw and scooped him end over end. He brought up against a tree with a jar which dislodged his intent. She repeatedly impressed it upon him that he was not to molest these animals.

The Shoshones knew far more of the teachings of Manitou than the white man knows of the workings of Nature. The white men believe that nature has endowed all other animals with an instinctive knowledge which leads them to avoid the porcupine. Manitou had let it be known to the Shoshone that this avoidance comes to pass in the same instinctive way in which the scorched papoose dreads the cook fire in the tepee.

Logo chanced across a porcupine when far from his mother. The menace of her paw was a menace temporarily removed. Nevertheless his approach was cautious. He reached out a tentative forepaw. There was a single lightning flip of the murderous tail and Logo fell backward, bouncing about in terrible agony. No less than two score quills were driven solidly home in paw and forearm. After a few acrobatics occasioned by the first shock of surprise and torture he

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would have attacked again with grizzly tenacity, but his mother arrived in time to discourage this.

He pulled out the stubborn quills with his teeth. Many were broken off and worked deep into the flesh. After his rage had cooled and his pain grew hot he was conscious of still another fact—that the porcupine was bad medicine for small bears. He was very sore for weeks. The deadly little points worked through and festered under the skin. He walked on but three legs.

During this period their trail once more crossed that of Saka and Tumwa. Saka, too held one foot carefully suspended. One side of Tumwa's face was swollen twice its natural size. He was gaunt and thin from eating little to save the pain the operation brought him. Both were filled with instinctive knowledge and porcupine quills.

Logo learned many new and interesting things each day, but principally he learned of food. He even ate sand and mouthfuls of fresh earth and clay. As the season advanced he added every new berry as it appeared and for two months he lived on almost an exclusive fruit diet. Wild strawberries, service berries, choke-cherries, red raspberries, gooseberries, currants and the seed pods of the wild rose all swelled the list of edibles.

It was in the berry patches that he first learned a part fact which dovetailed nicely with another part previously stored away. In the hills they had crossed many trails of animals who left a very rank scent. His mother had frequently circled spots from which

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this scent came fresh. He had neither sight nor sound of these beasts to associate with their odor. Therefore while scent was even more actual than sight to him, yet it was only a part fact until some other sense was added. He judged that they must be some new kind of porcupine from the fact that his mother avoided them.

One day he rambled far ahead of his mother and this scent came from a berry patch ahead. He approached it and heard their voices, then saw the beasts themselves—queer two-legged creatures. They seemed to have no quills. He drew near for a closer inspection. There were dozens of the man beasts and they drew aside before him, looking anxiously down the slope into the timber from which he had come. His mother caught the man scent and lumbered forward to join him. They forged straight ahead through the berry patch and the prior occupants gave trail as they advanced.

Logo became conscious of a very curious thing which had never before been called to his attention: It required the coördination of three senses—part facts—to round out the whole—the senses of hearing, sight and smell. But after once being completed things which had previously been merely part facts were now capable of being translated into the whole without coördination. He now had only to catch their trail scent in the timber, hear their voices in the distance or see their upright figures silhouetted on some far off rim—any one of these without the others—to have the knowledge of the whole before him.

The grizzly is a beast of great sagacity, and Logo was

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capable of associating one known fact with others and thus gaining a third. This process was an unconscious one and therefore hazy, but it was working, nevertheless. His mother avoided the two-legged creatures. When she stumbled full upon them they returned the compliment by avoiding her, and from this Logo came to understand that there was a mutual respect between the Shoshones and his own kind; that they were jointly the rulers of all the hills. Why they should be accorded such sharing of privileges with the grizzly tribe he did not know, but his mother so decreed it.

The Shoshones often noted this cub who followed a yellowish she grizzly, yet whose own fur was dark, almost black, and shot through with long white guard hairs. He had, too, a white face and his belly fur was yellowish. Truly this was the cub of whom Pakatan had spoken.

Late in October Logo lost his ever-present appetite. They were far up on the slope of the Wapiti Divide and the old bear felt less and less inclined to travel. She selected a hollow under the roots of an overblown spruce and deepened it. They evidently sided with the Shoshones in their quarrel, for neither of them touched a morsel of food for several days prior to denning, but instead drank quantities of water, washing their intestines spotlessly clean before retiring to the hole.

Logo was restless and frequently moved out for a look round. This restlessness subsided and he slept while the snow drifted deep across the opening and sealed them in.

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The old bear brought forth no cubs that winter. The Shoshones knew from Manitou that a she bear has cubs but every second year and that the young bears follow their mothers both as cubs and yearlings; that it is this fact which leads the unknowing ones—such as the Blackfeet, who speak of yearling bears as big cubs—to believe that she bears produce each year.

Logo spent the following spring and summer much as he had his first, except that in early summer a big he grizzly joined them and traveled with them for two weeks. This old fellow had no love for Logo, nor yet any pronounced dislike. From long experience he had come to look upon a trailing yearling or two as a regularly accepted feature of each succeeding honeymoon.

As the summer waned Logo grew increasingly impatient of his mother's heavy-handed discipline. She seemed not to realize that he was growing up and should therefore be accorded greater privileges; instead she cuffed him soundly and frequently.

When denning time came they were heartily sick of each other and Logo refused to den with her. In any event she would have driven him out if he had so decided. He crawled under a flat slab in a rock slide and let the deep snow form his blanket.

He came forth in the spring a full two weeks before his mother. After the period of relaxing his intestines with grass and stringent twigs he fared forth alone to search for the remains of the winter-killed. At each new find the former proprietor moved off and left him in full charge. Everything was running smoothly, but

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no more so than he had been led to expect. But at last he learned something decidedly new.

He neared an elk carcass and a great he grizzly fed there. He failed to move off as the young bear approached. It was high time that this big gray beast learned who it was that came. Logo growled a warning, but the old fellow paid no heed. He charged headlong—and the big silvertip calmly knocked him thirty feet with a sweep of his paw. He knew from long experience that a two-year-old grizzly was not accompanied by a terrible fighting female. Logo rushed again with redoubled fury and again the old bear knocked him end over end. As he prepared for his third attack the big grizzly whirled on him with bared teeth and bristling roach. This young fool who so persistently disturbed his meal should be accorded some drastic lessons in proper conduct.

The memory of his mother's punishing paw welled up out of the past, coupled with a part fact stored away long ago: Some large grizzlies could inflict hurt upon some young grizzlies. It was sound judgment, not fear, which caused Logo to turn aside in his third rush and keep on going. Many grizzlies have been born with a tinge of yellow in their fur, but no single one with a yellow streak. Logo had merely learned a lesson which all two-year-old grizzlies must learn.

His further schooling followed unpleasantly close upon the first. Two grizzly cubs approached an elk upon which he fed. When he failed to leave both youngsters charged him. Logo sent them sprawling,

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and their squalls of rage as they bounced valiantly back to the attack roused a very sleepy old she bear some distance away.

Logo had never concerned himself over why big he grizzlies had fled before his tiny rushes when he had been but an insignificant mite of a cub. The answer was now thrust upon him.

A furious fighting avalanche bore down on him. He was juggled horribly from side to side. Savage teeth tore at his neck and great mauling forepaws hammered him. Flashing claws raked him from end to end. Eventually he found all four feet upon the ground at once and fled with the enraged mother in hot pursuit. By virtue of his greater speed he escaped with his life.

Many men have found that a two-year-old bear can run away from their hounds, where an older heavier bear plays out. The Shoshones knew from the wisdom of Manitou that there is a reason why a grizzly is speedier in his youth than at maturity; that lacking this speed all grizzlies would surely die as two-year-olds as a direct consequence of their own indiscretions.

Logo was much battered and he sulked among the rims, rolling in the mud of the elk wallows to keep the flies from his wounds. Here he came face to face with another mud-encrusted figure. Tumwa, too, had been learning things. Later he met Saka similarly plastered with mud.

He rapidly learned the lessons of his own kind, but he was long in learning the lessons of man. He met many Shoshones in the hills and they respected him.

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In the valley of the Stinking Water the tepees in their villages were as numerous as the burrows of prairie dogs in the foothills. He feared them as little as he did the timid elk and deer. He avoided them less and less as no new reasons occurred to prove their right to share privileges with the bald-face kind. The memory that his mother had usually circled their camps was the one dim restraining touch which held him back from invading their main village with as little impunity as he felt in going among the elk herds. He had never seen evidence of their quills.

In his fifth year Logo first learned one of the reasons why grizzlies sometimes disliked the man scent. He passed what appeared to be an unusually solid arrangement of windfall logs wedged in between close-growing trees. It was open at one end and a large piece of meat was suspended at the far extremity. He entered and tore this down. He heard logs sliding solidly into place behind him, but paid no heed. Not until he turned to leave did he discover that his way was blocked. Even then he rambled round the pen, not fully realizing for some time that he was really trapped and shut off from the free hills. But at last he knew.

The man scent was heavy and he knew this for their work.

High above in their hunting camp in the sheep country a band of Shoshones listened to the bellowing roar as he battled for hour after hour at the logs. The bear pens were used year after year and this one had

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grown old. When the Shoshones slipped through the trees at dawn they found that a joint had given before his heaving strength and the bear was gone.

Thereafter Logo despised the man scent and where feasible avoided it, not from fear but from a vast dislike of this reeking odor which recalled the hours he had spent walled in by logs. A new sound was now heard in the hills; a roar which rumbled and echoed among the rims. Black-powder muzzle-loaders—trade guns in the hands of the warring Blackfeet and Shoshones. At first the source of these sounds was unknown to him, but eventually he knew and associated them and the reek of powder fumes with the man scent.

As he grew older he increased his range. He left his tracks on the Gibbon and the Firehole, the Yellowstone and the Buffalo Fork of the Snake. But always he came back to sleep the long sleep in the Wapiti Mountains, the place of birth. And as he looked down from the valley rims he noticed that the tepees in the swarming villages on the banks of the Stinking Water grew fewer year by year. The strange roars in the hills were much more frequent, sometimes thundering for hours at a time, accompanied by the savage war whoops of those who bitterly defended or contested Logo's right to feed or fast before denning.

The war parties that followed the game trails through the hills were but half their former size, then but a fourth—a fraction. In his youth Logo had seen these parties winding in single file as far as his eye could reach, the finery of the gayly bedecked war-

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riors glistening like the scales of a many-hued serpent twisting its tortuous course across the hills. By comparison they now seemed but marauding bands, not the assembled fighting strength of a nation. As these bands wound up some valley or filed past him in the night Logo noted a giant warrior at their head towering almost a foot above his fellows. Tumwa-Ka-Tin, the young ruler of the Shoshones, led the thinning ranks to battle and all enemies gave trail before his prowess.

The crashing reports grew less frequent, then very rare. Logo threaded the valley of the Stinking Water in his thirtieth year and as he passed along the banks he stopped and stood swaying from side to side as he looked across at a few shadowy figures squatting round a fire on the opposite shore. The firelight reflected on but a score of tepees on the spot where a thousand lodges had once stood. A mighty warrior stood before the blaze and his voice boomed across the waters as he sought to infuse his few followers with his own never-failing courage. But the spirit of the tribe was broken and Logo saw no more war parties in the hills. They did not even hunt, but gathered about the council fires and made medicine to Manitou while the squaws gathered grasshoppers and berries and dried them for winter food. Of them all, only one hunted for red meat which would put new life and heart and courage in the men.

Tumwa-Ka-Tin scoured the hills for meat. His trail crossed Logo's many times and the big grizzly

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came to know him—the first man he had singled out as an individual, having always before classed men as a whole. But always the Shoshone chief had known Logo from other bears. As a cub the wise men had pointed him out as the bear of Pakatan's prophecy and now that he had attained such size there was no doubt upon this point. Logo frequently saw the brawny chief with a whole buck or bighorn ram slung across his shoulders. Sometimes they met face to face and each veered from his trail to let the other pass. And each time Tumwa-Ka-Tin gave the greeting sign used between the highest chiefs.

Except when mating with some she bear Logo was fond of company and often traveled with other big grizzlies, Saka and Tumwa among the rest. There came a day when the three of them wandered up the valley and found but a single tepee to mark the site of a once mighty nation. The white plague had ravaged the villages of Shoshone and Blackfoot alike. The remnants of both tribes had intermingled and now lived in a single village far down in the low country near the edge of the settlements.

These Indians told strange tales to the white men with whom they traded. They spoke of Tumwa-Ka-Tin—Three-Bears-In-One—the ancient chieftain who had stayed behind in the ancestral valley to rule his nation—a nation which now numbered but one lodge, that of his own grandson and his young squaw, the last of the full-blood Shoshones. They told too of a mighty bear, Logo, the grizzly king, whose tracks had

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been seen on the head reaches of the river since the day of Manitou, which was the beginning of all things.

But Logo knew nothing of all this. He merely knew the actual that unrolled before him from day to day. Long ago a thousand lodges had lined the banks of the river—now there was but one.

For more than a quarter of a century Logo heard no more of the crashing reports. The Shoshone chief was the only man whose trail scent was crossed in the hills. Logo came to accept him as a fixture—as one whose trail he would always cross the same as he would those of Saka, Tumwa and others of his friends. The chief's black hair turned gray, then white, but he carried his head as proudly as before and never once through all the years did he fail to flash Logo the hailing sign of royalty when they met.

Then Logo began to hear the reports once more, but with a sharper, snappier sound—the magazine guns of the whites. These became more frequent as ever-increasing numbers of white men penetrated the hills each year. Logo found the remains of many animals, his own kind among the lot, stripped of their pelts and left behind. He crossed the trail scent of men, but his habits were still the same. Nothing had occurred as yet to show him that he must change his ways.

One day he traveled with the wind at his back and the man scent came from behind him with great persistence. He could not seem to shake it off. He knew it was the body scent which he smelled, but not once did it occur to him that a man would deliberately

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take up his trail. He crossed an opening in the timber and turned to see a man come from the far edge along his track. Not until within fifty yards did the hunter look up and see the big grizzly standing just within the timber. Instead of retreating he threw something to his shoulder and peered at Logo down the length of it. There was menace in the move and Logo growled a warning.

There came a shattering report and something seemed to tear through his chest with rending pain. Logo rushed him with bellowing fury, but the man stood his ground. Twice more the roar crashed in his ears in rapid succession and each time the tearing pain racked his body. Then Logo struck him down. He seized the limp form by the shoulder and shook it savagely, then fled from the spot.

The man revived and crawled to his camp where he told the tale of the monster silvertip whose tracks measured twelve inches in length and ten and a half across. The hunter swore that his belly fur was yellowish and that his face was white. The Shoshone legend of the grizzly king was verified.

Logo was very sick and near to death. For weeks he stayed in the same down-timbered pocket lest traveling should reopen his wounds.

Logo now realized that he had found a fact which was beyond his comprehension. He had found that men controlled some mysterious force which inflicted hurt at a distance. They did not need actual contact with their enemies as did other animals. Logo was a

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very intelligent beast. He knew that a new order of things had come to pass; that the grizzly was no longer king.

His wounds were scarcely healed before another man was on his trail. His old dislike for the man scent had been intensified a hundredfold by this latest evidence of their treachery. He avoided the man who trailed him by the simple process of walking faster than the man could follow.

Twice more within a month men tracked him. For the first time in his life he knew vindictiveness. He had fought with other bears, but bore them no malice. When he had killed elk it had been for food. Now a dull rage seemed always with him. There is not a doubt but that many superior animals have pride. The springy stride and high-held head of the dog, transformed into an air of drooping dejection when in disgrace with the master, is evidence of this; the thoroughbred who runs his heart out to be first under the wire. There is that same pride and spirit, the desire to excel, in animals as in man.

Logo experienced a distinct sense of humiliation at being thus deposed as monarch of the hills. His placid good nature curdled under this treatment and he felt a murderous fury when the man scent came strong. And his was the dangerous anger of the powerful good-natured man who is suddenly engulfed in a berserk rage occasioned by some wrongful persecution. He met Saka and Tumwa and sensed in them the same deadly quality which had replaced his own even temper.

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Then came the day when he turned on his tormentors. The wind carried the message that a man was on his trail. He turned in his tracks, his hair bristling as the fresh scent steeled his rage. But he knew the danger of the fast-shooting guns. He turned and walked straight ahead past a tangle of down timber, then circled swiftly back and crouched flat ten yards from his trail.

A man came swinging along on his tracks and Logo watched him come. As he drew even with the bear Logo's eagerness betrayed his whereabouts. He chomped his teeth rapidly together before he made his rush and the man whirled instantly and threw his rifle to his shoulder. He had time for but one shot as a towering beast intent upon his death covered the short distance between them. The ball plowed along Logo's jaw, shattering the outer surface of the bone and tearing along his shoulder, but he did not waver a single inch in his rush.

He tore the man down and mauled him. He seized the gun in his teeth and worried it. The barrel was hot from the recent firing and he dropped it and ran on. The pain in his jaw prevented him from eating his fill and he went into the winter in poor shape.

His fame had spread and all men coveted his wonderful pelt. When he came forth in the spring there seemed to be an ever-present menace hanging on his back track in the soft spring drifts. Within a week after coming from the den he was shot at once more. He whirled in a rage and forged down in the direction

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of the shot. It sounded again and there was a sickening snap and rush of air near his head. He altered his course and fled. He had learned to give trail for the magazine gun.

He found more and more dead animals in the hills and knew that they had been slain by the thundering rifles. He met fewer grizzlies each year and there were many old friends whose trails he no longer crossed. The bald-face tribe was slow to accept the new order of things and learn the lesson of the fast-shooting gun—and their ranks were thinned.

For untold centuries his kind had shared with the Shoshones the joint monarchy over all the hills. Logo still found their old-time hunting camps; their tepee poles old and brittle, leaned against the lodgepoles in the timber; their old log bear pens still stood in the hills and would stand for a hundred years, but the Shoshones themselves were gone. And now his own kind had reached the beginning of the end.

Down in the lonely tepee Tumwa-Ka-Tin was also feeling the pressure of new conditions. The first of the whites, having small use for involved nomenclature, had arbitrarily rechristened him and called him Three-Bear. They had renamed the Stinking Water, calling it the Shoshone after this last man of the race whom they found living on its shores.

The ways of the white man were not his ways and he was too old to learn. He had steadfastly believed that the Shoshones, who had fled in time of plague, would one day listen to the call of the hills and return. His

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one hope had been that he would live to see the day when the smoke from a thousand Shoshone wigwams would once more drift above the valley. The white men told him that they would never come—that the last few of them had been confined to a reservation thirty sleeps away and that there they would remain. He felt the full burdens of his years and longed for the day when he could lay them down.

Among the white men who came to the Land of Many Rivers was Jacques Lear. From a long line of French Canadian forbears he had inherited wonderful strength, a stout heart—and little else. He fared down from the North in search of that wonderful place which lies ever just ahead—always just around the bend or over the next divide. Here he found untold variety of game and fur where the animals of the South meet and mingle with those of the North. There are antelope in the flats and white-tail deer in the low cottonwood valleys; elk and blacktail in the hills and big-horn sheep in the peaks. Bears—black, brown and grizzly—find shelter in the timber. Mink and otter follow the streams and there are moose in the beaver swamps of the Yellowstone. Red, cross and silver foxes travel the high divides. Ermine and marten leave their tracks in the timber where the lynx meets the bobcat, his Southern cousin. Badger and swift fox burrow in the bad lands and wolf greets coyote in the foothills. The wolverine of the North feasts on the victims wantonly killed and left behind by the mountain lion, slayer of the South.

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And here Jacques Lear found his long-sought paradise of game and fur.

It was now only a question of the one best spot of all this good land in which to settle. He came out upon the snow combs of the Wapiti Mountains and looked down upon the green spring in the lovely valley of the Stinking Water. He plunged down across the white peaks and over the packed drifts of the spruce slopes until he came out at last upon the spring-garbed shores of the stream. Here he drove his ax to the eye in an aspen trunk and strode on, carrying only his rifle and a few of the finest furs of his winter's catch. It was his way of saying that it was to this spot he would return and build his home after trading his furs for supplies in the distant settlements.

A mile below Jacques saw a single tepee standing in a little glade on the banks of the stream. An aged Indian sat before it eying the approaching stranger. He noted Jacques' tall powerful figure and the easy swinging stride which spoke of strength and self-assurance. He called to someone inside and the tepee flap opened as a young girl came out and stood beside him.

"He has come," said Tumwa-Ka-Tin.

"True, father," Jacques smiled. "I have come."

"Are you not Saka-Tumwa, the silvertip?" the aged chief inquired.

"You mistake me, father," Jacques said. "I am called Jacques Lear."

"No matter," said the Indian. "You are the one

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of whom Pakatan has spoken. Many white men have come and gone, but you have come to stay."

Jacques looked upon the loveliness of the girl and bowed assent.

"Yes," he answered. "I have come to stay. My ax still quivers in an aspen trunk scarce a mile upstream."

"It is well you have come," the old man said. "The white men call me Three-Bear. I am very old. The grass has turned green on more than a hundred springs since that time when Pakatan made his prophecy. This is Meteetse, the daughter of my grandson. She is the last princess of the Shoshones."

Since her earliest infancy Meteetse had heard of Pakatan's saying. Whites had come to the banks of the Stinking Water and gone on, leaving her unmoved. Now she looked upon the comely strength of Jacques and knew that Pakatan had spoken well.

And Jacques, as he resumed his journey to the settlements, marveled at the miracle which had led him to strike his ax at that very spot.

In the settlements he heard of the great bear, Logo, whose pelt all men desired. He heard too the legend at which men laughed—the fable that allowed the Shoshone chief but three days of life after the passing of the grizzly king. But Jacques did not laugh. He knew that he must not kill this bear. In truth it seemed that no man was able to do that. The white men had sought his pelt for thirty years, but he still wore it about in the hills.

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Logo had turned his feet to new trails. He had the sagacity to know that habits are dangerous and he changed old-established customs to meet the new conditions. He knew that men watched the carcasses of winterkilled elk for grizzlies to feed in the spring. He fed but once at a place and never returned to it.

All old grizzlies learn what few other animals ever fathom—that men follow a trail by sight, not scent. Logo broke his trail for visibility, crossing boulder fields and wind-swept ridges where his broad feet left no sign, or traveled on the pine-straw carpet under the trees.

In addition to all this he had learned one thing which few even of his own kind ever learn until too late. All through the hills men set great traps, the largest made. A grizzly fears nothing on earth except a man with a gun, relying on his massive strength to handle all other issues. Gifted with wisdom in all other things, he is stupid as to traps and will walk into one that animals of the lowest brain power will avoid.

But no trapper looked upon his trap and found Logo fastened there. The white men had made use of the log pens of the Shoshones, repairing and strengthening them. It was this which made Logo trapwise. For a century there had been lying dormant in some cell of the old bear's mind a dread which had quickened to life at once more smelling bait in the bear pens of the Shoshones; a dread of logs which penned him in and shut him off from the hills. He would go near no bait which bore the least taint of man scent.

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Tumwa and Saka were two of the last of his old friends to go. He found Saka in the heart of a windfall jam, where he had crawled to die with a bullet through his lungs.

Later he saw Tumwa raging and foaming at the steel thing which clamped his foot. This in turn was toggled to a green log six inches through and twenty feet in length. Tumwa was past reason and could not recognize his friend. All things were enemies in his last extremity. He had wrecked every living thing over half an acre, breaking off young trees and biting the bark from others. He roared at Logo in a frenzy of hatred and waved the trap in the air, jerking the log toggle about and smashing it against the trees.

As Logo moved on he felt very tired. It is doubtful if he remembered his first tussle with Tumwa a century before, but he did know him for an old-time comrade of years' standing and felt a sense of loss at his passing.

The hard life was aging Logo two years for each one he lived. He had changed his denning habits with the rest. Someone hung always on his trail right up to denning time. Now he waited for some heavy storm and traveled far, the snow blotting out his tracks, and crawled under a windfall jam in the heavy timber while the snow buried him. Early spring thaws frequently drowned him out before he was ready to wake. He denned in this manner on the fall of the year that Jacques Lear came to the valley of the Stinking Water.

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The Shoshone chief was failing fast and to Jacques he explained the reason for this.

"The great bear rolls restlessly in his den," he said. "Logo has not long to live. There is an ache in his bones. The ways of the white men are not his ways—or mine. It is well that very soon now the two of us should go back to the old ways together."

And Jacques Lear, who believed not at all in prophecies, knew that this one would be fulfilled. The old chief had long believed it. It had been a part of him for more than a hundred years and whenever the news came to him that Logo was no more, then the very strength of his belief would serve to close his eyes and still his heart. This Jacques knew—and so it later proved.

The heart of the aged chief was troubled. The Shoshone who sought a bride first approached the head man of her lodge with presents. The white man's way was the reverse of this. The head of the girl's household gave presents to accompany the departing bride. He had little to give. Was Meteetse, the last princess of the Shoshones, to go to her white suitor with no inheritance?

There was but one way. The white men placed great value upon the pelt of the grizzly king. This pelt should be her dowry.

In the spring he took up Logo's trail. The old Indian knew the habits of the animals of the hills as well as they did themselves—better, for it is not within

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the province of beasts to know that the living of their daily lives is habit. He unerringly picked the one habit which Logo had failed to alter.

In common with all other game but the sheep he used the low saddles in the ridges when crossing from the head of one stream to the next in preference to selecting the higher rocky points.

The ridges which separated the tributary creeks swept back from the river and flared up against the base of the main divide at right angles. Near where each of these joined the parent range a deep notch or saddle in the crest of the ridge afforded an easy crossing.

Three-Bear selected one of these and waited for a drove of elk to cross. He dropped a cow in the very center of the open lane on the crest of the saddle. His patience was far greater than that of the white's. He took up his vigil and prayed that Manitou would send Logo to feed upon the elk. Day after day he watched it from the rocky point which commanded the notch.

Several bears came to feed, but not the bear he sought. Then at last he was rewarded. Logo came from the timber and crossed to the elk. He was very tired. If he lived the summer through it would surely be his last. He heard a queer droning chant, but could not locate its source. He stood swaying from side to side, his massive head drooping below the hump of his shoulders as he listened to the sound.

Up above a single voice was crooning the death chant. It carried Logo's mind back into the misty

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past as if he once more lived in the good days of old. For the voice carried the old powerful boom and rang with triumphant certainty.

"Manitou, thy son is coming. Meteetse shall have her inheritance. Logo is about to enter the land of Manitou and in three more days the last chief of the Shoshones will sit round the council fires of his people."

Logo stood in the open lane walled in by heavy timber. He looked a monster as ruggedly hewed as the hills he ranged, king of a vanishing race. The dying sun shone through a notch in the range and cast a searchlight tongue of flame, the tip of it just reaching the bear and turning the white guard hairs of his coat to sparkling silver.

And from the rocky knob above the last chief of the Shoshones was looking down the barrel at the grizzly king. He made the hailing sign of chief to chief, but Logo did not see. Neither did he hear the sharp report. He sank quietly down to rest and as the echoes of the shot roared up against the cliffs and on across the high divide there traveled with the sound the soul of the silvertip.

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It may be that when the Great God, Manitou, gave the name of Lou-pang to the big yellow cat in the beginning, he had temporarily forgotten that inconsistency in nomenclature is the failing of no one race, but instead is common to all peoples. Later, when his Shoshone children gathered around the council fire, it was customary for the warriors of the nation to arrange themselves according to their ability to "count Lou-pang"—the number of times they had mortally struck an enemy. A man must be at least a one-Lou-pang fighting man to hold the respect of his fellows, and he had attained the ultimate that this world holds out to mortals when at last his victories were so numerous as to be past counting, and he was no longer handicapped by a numerical prefix, but was hailed simply as a Lou-pang warrior.

The Shoshones were conscious of no discrepancy when they applied that title to their highest chiefs, with all the limitless bravery encompassed by the name, and in the next breath hissed the same word as they viewed the round tracks of the tawny killer in the snow. Applied to man, it was the last word in compliment,

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to the big cat it was the last depth of defamation, meaning striker, it is true, but a cringing striker—a cowardly slayer, and so on through all murderous appellations.

The three kits under the flat slab in the rock slide, having first looked upon the world long after the day of the Shoshones, were slated to be known to the white men as mountain lions, panthers, or cougars, according to where their wanderings led them; but even at this early age they were proving Manitou's wisdom in calling them Ne-Loupangs—little killers. When they quarreled among themselves, they did not strike in play but with every intent to mangle.

The male cub was larger and heavier boned than his two sisters and his ferocity was that of Loupang, the full-grown killer. They had but recently opened their eyes upon the rugged view of Crag Creek having been blind for several weeks, and with the eye opening had been born a craving for some food other than their mother's milk—a hunger that would not be stilled and which was but the forerunner of an everlasting appetite to kill. And there was no meat to appease it. Because of his larger body, the craving for food was even more urgent in Loupang than in his sisters.

His mother's choice of Crag Creek in which to rear a brood of ravenous young cougars was unfortunate in the extreme. Few animals elected to make this forbidding gorge their home.

The lioness peered forth from beneath the rock slab, her big yellow eyes blinking as the pupils contracted

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in readjustment to the light of day. Loupang crouched beside her, an exact miniature of his mother.

The flat ears and the oblique white line that streaked the brown under each eye lent a devilish cast to the cruel face. The old cat stretched, her supple body seeming to have no bones but to be composed all of rippling strength. The hips still held their erect position while the limber trunk dropped abruptly down from them until belly and chest touched the ground.

Her mouth distended in a yawn so wide that only the eyes peered past the red mask fringed with yellow fangs; the forearms stretched far out ahead, all toes spread wide apart and the savage claws unsheathed. She drew slowly erect as if by a muscular contraction, a drawing together, and the claws left their marks across the uneven surface of the rock.

Then she turned and sent Loupang sprawling with an expert stroke of paw as a reminder that he was not to follow, and she dropped down the slope preparatory to taking the meat trail.

Loupang lay upon the edge of the cave and watched her go, his ears filled with the deep throb that shook the cañon and which, having sounded continuously since his birth, was consequently as natural as life to him. He had never known silence.

The stream boiled down the last steep pitch and poured over the lip of the rim in a sheer fall of three hundred feet, pounding hollowly at the deep pool it had ground out through the ages. A mass of twisted spruce swept sharply up from the boulder-littered

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stream bed to the rock rubble that lay piled at the base of the walls on either side, these cliffs in turn towering thousands of feet to rear their crests above timberline. And through it all was the dull boom of the falls; Loupang snarled in unison with the sound as the twinges of hunger shook him, and often he turned a speculative eye upon his sleeping sisters.

This time the lioness was successful in her hunt. A yearling doe had wandered up the cañon and the lioness struck her down.

Loupang saw a movement on the spruce slope. It appeared to be his mother, yet there was a difference. He snarled uneasily. There seemed to be two of her; two heads, one having large ears which flopped and dangled, and a second body which crossed limply over his mother's back and dipped to the ground on the other side. Loupang's sisters came forth at his snarl and the three of them slipped warily down the slope.

The old cat dropped her prey, and the kits, having no further doubt of her identity, bounded down to greet her. Loupang had no knowledge of meat, but his hunger pangs were sharply multiplied by the fresh-blood scent. He shoved his blunt nose against the mangled neck of the doe and sniffed deeply, then drew back and licked his lips to free them of some sticky substance which smeared them. He tasted blood! And thus he learned of meat. He fell savagely upon the deer, sinking his claws deep to retain his hold as he tore at it with his teeth. His sisters learned as he had done, and all three were fastened on the victim

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before the old cat decided to drag it on up to the den. They clung like so many snarling leeches as she jerked them along. Once on the flat rock before the den they gorged, wrinkling their bloody little noses savagely as they snarled at each other across the feast.

The next day the old cat started out once more on the never-ending round of the lion in search of meat. Day after day she hunted without success and was forced to feed on the cold remains of the doe. Loupang's sense of taste was not so discriminating as that of his mother and he gorged heavily on the cold meat and found no fault with it. It was flat and tasteless to the lioness, and she ate only enough each day to give her sufficient strength to hunt.

The food supply was exhausted all too soon and Loupang knew the pinch of famine. The old cat was driven to hunt for rabbits, a prey usually scorned by this slayer of nobler game, and even rabbits were scarce in this gloomy pit. The three cubs grew weak and moved around but little while their mother was away on the meat trail. The two she cubs lost strength more rapidly than the hardier male, and one of them lay almost in a coma for two days.

Loupang did not know that his sisters were meat, but there was something in their scent that quickened his hunger. In sudden irritation over this fact he turned on his weakest sister and drove his teeth in her. There was a faint taste of blood on the points of his fangs when he withdrew them. Meat! He crouched

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and snarled as he regarded her intently through round, staring eyes.

An hour later the lioness returned from the meat trail to find that the inevitable had happened, and Loupang was quarreling with one sister over the last remains of the other. The old cat was not upset over this sacrifice of the family weakling to put new life in the rest. She had looked long upon the workings of The Law and knew it.

The Great God, Manitou, in his wisdom had decreed that life should go on only through death; that many must die that one might live, and that one, after living, should die at last that others might feed upon him and thus through his death find life. The law of the endless circle—Loupang's relation to the circle—was Ferocity.

He had justified his right to the relation and so commenced the fulfillment of his sole purpose on earth—to kill.

New strength flowed into his wasted frame from the cannibal feast, and the old cat set forth to lead the two cubs from this land of little meat.

They headed downstream and Loupang was shortly conscious of a new element—silence. The pound of the waterfall which he had known from birth was stilled by distance, only the tremble of it remaining without the sound. The silence was not complete, for there were lesser noises, but by comparison it seemed one vast quiet, and he was oppressed by it. From time

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to time the stream plunged down through some narrow, boulder-studded gorge with a rumble like that of the booming falls, and he was comforted by the sound. He learned that in the hills there are areas of sound and silence. Later he came to know that these larger phases of sound, the rush of water and wind, were mere matters of locality and had no real bearing on his life—that it was mainly those lesser sounds which spoke of life and meat that really mattered.

As the cañon widened out to join the Shoshone bottoms, he heard the rumble of the larger stream, and they came out into the land of plenty.

Here he learned to distinguish between the lesser sounds. He followed his mother on the meat trail, and so was educated to fill his niche in life and the workings of The Law.

At first he could see but one side of life, his own side, to kill and eat; but eventually he learned that while all animal life was meat, yet not all meat was prey.

There was one scent which he knew for that left by some kind of meat, but which filled his terrible mother with great unease whenever it came fresh on the wind. Always she investigated a warm scent of this kind, looping and circling through the timber with every faculty alert. The old cat never fled in too great haste, and only after determining the exact location of the menace or assuring herself that it had gone did the lioness resume her careless wanderings.

Loupang knew this danger scent long before he had

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sight or sound to link with it. But he learned these other elements at last. They were crossing a ridge from one stream to the next when the old cat suddenly dropped flat beside a rock on a boulder-strewn sidehill. The two cubs crouched beside her.

Loupang heard strange animal voices and saw a figure moving toward them, apparently walking on but two legs while the others dangled oddly at its sides. Here was meat walking straight into the trap! The man beast was but a boy, not yet full grown. Loupang could not know this, but he did know that the approaching animal seemed weak, his gait awkward and stumbling as compared to that of other animals. The cub's muscles tensed with eagerness for the spring which would send him through the air to sink his teeth in the kill when his mother struck it down.

Then Loupang caught the danger scent and knew for the first time that these two-legged beasts were the ones who left it. He sensed then that his mother's crouch was one of cringing fear, and he felt his own seething lust to kill transformed into a sickening dread of being killed himself. Ferocity oozed out of him in the face of danger.

The boy paused within thirty feet and the relief was like a resurrection from a living death when Loupang saw him round the shoulder of the hill and thought he had seen the last of him. He could not know that this meeting was but the first and that Matt Lear's trail would cross his own for as long as he survived The Law of the circle and left his tracks in the hills.

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Loupang's ruling characteristic could not be submerged for long. Every day he felt Ferocity expanding within him until it was almost the whole of him. Matt Lear had scarcely passed out of sight before Ferocity was once more transcendent over dread and the cougar family resumed the eternal hunt.

The breeze carried the message of meat, and they traveled cautiously into the wind with the warm deer scent playing full upon their nostrils. Loupang lived but for the final spring. He had made that spring many times, in no way discouraged by the fact that he had usually fallen short. He had frequently attained enough distance to secure a rump hold and had clawed desperately to retain it. Scores of deer bore the marks of his youthful practice.

The deer scent now came hot and reeking. Three does were bedded down in the shade of a ledge. Crouching almost flat, bellies low to the ground, the old cat and the two cubs neared the edge, and once gaining it their muscles were bunched for a swift strike as they peered below.

The lioness leaped in a graceful twenty-foot curve and struck. A fear-crazed doe sprang from her bed immediately beneath Loupang, and he drove at her with every ounce of his strength. As he swept through the air above her his feet were stretched far out to each side, toes spread rigidly apart, and the flashing claws unsheathed. He landed full and drove his hind claws in the loins at the instant that he struck wickedly toward the center with the hooks of both forefeet and secured a hold far down each side.

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The stricken doe fled madly through the timber and Loupang rode her, his teeth tearing at her neck while the low-hanging branches whipped and pounded him. Twice the doe fell and rolled end over end downhill, smashing him against the ground, but each time she regained her feet only to find the killer fastened upon her as firmly as before. Loupang was Ferocity, and nothing could break the hold of those curved hooks. Then the victim went down to stay; her front feet buckled under, and she slid headlong down a steep slope—and Loupang rode her to the end.

It was well that he had learned to kill. Within a week he discovered one of the limitations with which Manitou had handicapped all killers. Loupang heard a faint clamoring of animal voices that were new to him. His mother listened to this distant sound for but a single second before turning and holding a steady gait in the opposite direction. A party of early fall hunters had loosed twelve terrible hounds on a track left by Loupang's mother a few hours earlier in the day.

The old cat's agitation increased as the dread baying hounds followed the trail through the down-timbered bottoms, then clear and distinct as the pack swept along the crest of some bald ridge. The lioness whirled suddenly and broke into full flight, running in great bounds toward the rimrocks of the high country, when the bellowing dogs streamed over a ridge two miles behind.

A cougar can travel endlessly at a swinging walk;

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he is capable of one magnificent burst of speed for a few short yards, but cover any considerable distance at a rapid gait he cannot. Thus Manitou once more disclosed his unerring wisdom by so constructing Loupang that, if he missed his prey on that first rush, he was unable to follow at great speed and so harry the grazing tribes from the face of the earth with his continual urge to kill.

At the end of half a mile Loupang was running behind his mother and the she cub was a like distance behind him. The old cat's sides were heaving, and her bounds were short and broken. The outcome of the race was sure. They were running up a long, timbered ridge that stretched away to the high rims of the main divide and the clamor behind them was drawing nearer. The she cub gave out and turned downhill. Then Loupang reached the end of his strength. He veered close to the sheer side of the ridge and leaped straight out and down, landing in the very tip of a mighty spruce that rose from the slope below. The main pack swept on up the ridge in full tongue, but two slow running dogs in the rear caught the scent of the forking trail and killed the she cub on the ground. Loupang clung to his tree, and the hounds raged past on his mother's tracks.

The played-out lioness had taken to a tree two hundred yards beyond, and the death pack reached the end of the trail. Three men pounded up the ridge on lathered horses.

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Loupang left his tree when they had passed and, while the hunters were busy stripping off his mother's pelt, the half-grown cub was heading for another hunting ground.

All through the years Loupang's trail crossed and recrossed Matt Lear's trail in the hills. The youth had grown to manhood before he caught his first glimpse of Loupang or knew him apart from others of his tribe.

Matt Lear's wanderings in the hills were almost as constant as Loupang's own, and at the outset the purpose of the two had been the same—to kill. In the beginning it was but with the single object of perfecting himself as a killer that the boy had studied the ways of all animals. He had learned the habits of cougars among others, and his knowledge of their ways was large, covering the broad experience of years, and yet through it all he could single out no one individual to observe. The very nature of the big cat prevented this, and rather his information was gathered from following the tracks of many and interpreting and piecing together the bits of sign which each trail revealed.

He had followed Loupang's tracks many times, knowing him merely as a cougar among others. Loupang had left an irregular, tangled chain of more than two thousand victims in his wake, and all horned game from the antelope in the flats to the stanchest old

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ram among the peaks knew and dreaded him before Matt Lear had set eyes upon him once; yet Loupang had seen the man a hundred times.

The big cat is primarily the greatest of all stalkers, and so of natural consequence the most difficult of all animals to stalk; for he brings the same qualities to play in escaping death that he makes use of to inflict death upon others. When tracked Loupang circled back and peered down upon his trailer from some ledge, or shifted back and viewed him through the heavy timber, then looped again, sometimes traveling in a straight-away course, but always with the certain knowledge of his trailer's whereabouts.

Matt Lear lived his life in the hills, but his fame as a guide had spread far through the outside world, and many men came to his cabin on the Shoshone, knowing that if they could secure him as their guide they would leave the hills with the hide or head of any animal they had come to hunt.

Matt Lear's most solid enjoyment in life came during those trips with his friend, Enright, who spent more and more time in the hills each year. It was on one of those trips that the two men looked upon Loupang for the first time.

They lay in a rocky basin above timberline, looking through powerful glasses for signs of sheep. Their purpose was not to kill but to observe. Matt Lear no longer killed these rare animals for meat, killed them not at all except when out with some hunter who had come to this far place in search of one. The basin

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was partially walled in by cliffs that rose sheer from the rock sides at their base. Above the cliffs a green meadow pitched sharply down to the rims, and on the very edge of those an old ram stood and gazed down into the basin. His telescopic eyes had picked up the two men the instant they rounded the shoulder of the cliff. He was not alarmed, having the men below him and in plain sight, and he presently resumed his bed, the curl of his horns resting on the rims and supporting his head as he watched them.

The two friends waited patiently for signs of any movement on the cliff face which would show the presence of other rams. Then Matt Lear suddenly pointed.

"See!" he exclaimed.

Enright trained his glasses on the spot indicated and was treated to a sight which it is given to but few to ever witness.

A long, tawny shape glided down across the green meadow above the cliffs and crept toward the old ram. There was menace in every sinewy movement. Both men threw up their rifles for a long shot to frighten off the cougar and save the sheep, then lowered them as the old ram raised suddenly to his feet and dropped over the edge of the rims. He landed easily on a narrow ledge ten feet below and bounded along its course as it angled sharply down the cliff.

Loupang followed like a clinging shadow. The ram came to the end of the ledge. It pinched off into space. Ten feet from its termination a sloping knob two feet

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across protruded from the wall and the sheep leaped for it, lighting surely on its sloping surface. The still blank of the cliff face was suddenly relieved by movement. Five rams appeared as if by magic, starting from their beds on some unsuspected shelf at this invasion of their home by the tawny menace. They worked from point to point along the wall angling up or down according to the lay of the outcropping rocks. Loupang followed first one and then the next.

It appeared to the two tense watchers below as if all these actors must be suspended by invisible threads, their points of footing being imperceptible.

Loupang's long tail waved up or down, acting as an aid to balance each time he leaped from one point to the next. Even if he had drawn up within distance he would not have struck—and knew it. Killer and victim would have fallen to eternity together. His purpose was to harry them to some spot where he could safely spring.

Matt Lear, too, knew that the lion would not leap. Loupang alighted on a tiny knob, teetering as a bird on a swaying bough. There was a sudden splintering of rock a few feet ahead of his nose, and the biting fragments spattered him; the sharp, singing hiss of the rifle ball glancing along the rock chilled him, and then the sound of the shot roared up against the cliffs. Matt Lear had tried a long shot.

As Loupang fled for safety the vicious spats against the rocks and the hissing song of ricochets were all about him. The echoes stirred by two fast-shooting

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rifles filled the basin and swelled in overlapping waves of sound which piled up against the cliffs with an intensity that jarred the very foundation of the hills. Loupang felt a sudden numbing shock midway of his long tail. Then he gained the rims and, as he fled across the steep-pitched meadow above them a ball ripped the sod between his feet before he could cross over the sky line to safety.

Enright gingerly touched the hot barrel of his rifle.

"Eight hundred yards," he estimated. "That's chance shooting at a running lion. My front sight covered five times his size on the cliff. He was a small cougar."

Matt Lear smiled and shook his head.

"Small from distance, yes," he said. "But in reality the largest Loupang I ever saw. I compared him with the rams. His pelt will stretch nine feet or better from tip to tip."

"Nine feet!" Enright marveled. His own best rug of this kind measured eight feet five and his collection of trophies was exceptional, containing the pelts and heads of many record animals. "It is this old fellow then who makes the big tracks you have seen."

"It may be that all the tracks were his," Matt Lear agreed. "It is hard to say. There may be several of his size. The over-large tracks have been seen for fifty miles through the hills for the past five years. The tribe of Loupang is a wandering tribe. No man can be sure of him; but, at least, this one will be marked. The bone of his tail was splintered by a

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shot and it sagged heavily at the end. It will not heal straight—and whenever Loupang sits in the snow he will leave his mark.

And this surmise proved true. Loupang felt a heaviness in his tail for weeks, even after the bone had healed. A hard growth formed at the point of fracture and beyond it toward the tip the tail took an ugly slant to the right. The cords, too, were injured; with every other muscle in his splendid body under perfect control, this last tip end of him responded but sluggishly.

His balance was not so superb and faultless as before, but in the main it bothered him very little. He was still the prince of killers and followed his trade relentlessly.

The two men cut Loupang's trail in the first tracking snow of fall and followed it. Half a mile from where they first picked it up they came upon a spot where Loupang had rested, sitting back on his haunches, and his long tail had left its imprint in the snow. He was marked, indeed, for the tail showed a sharp list to the right.

They followed cautiously on the trail, looking far ahead through the trees, their feet making no sound on the soft new snow. An hour from the start they came out upon a ledge in the timber and saw where Loupang had crouched flat and peered from behind a screening bush.

Enright could not repress a shiver as he looked down and saw their own tracks twenty feet below and knew

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that Loupang had crouched there and watched them follow past on his trail. He reflected that this beast who could creep upon a wary buck with every sense keen and alert would have no difficulty in stalking man, the one beast who stumbles through the hills with indifferent senses, and once struck from behind by a compact bundle of terrible strength that can tear down the stoutest bull elk, a man's gun would avail him little.

But Matt Lear, even while knowing this to be true, only smiled. He knew Loupang's relation to The Law. Manitou had given the big cat Ferocity. But Ferocity is not courage—rather it is a gauge of cowardice. Matt Lear spoke of this to Enright.

"Loupang will never strike," he said. "You have heard much of his savagery toward man—all of it is untrue. Loupang has no stomach to face anything he suspects will strike at him in return. Rest assured that no one of his tribe will ever attack a man."

The two men picked up Loupang's trail after each succeeding storm, reading his every move on the white page of the snow, tracking him through a never-ending series of kills, and in the end always finding some sign which indicated that Loupang had discovered them.

Enright had every hope of taking this huge cougar and frequently made the prediction that they would soon have his pelt. Matt Lear was not so sure. He had trailed a score of cougars to every one that he had seen. The one sure way of stretching Loupang's pelt was now prohibited by law.

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Matt Lear, who had perfected himself as a killer, had made a strong stand for laws which would limit killing, and his efforts had at last borne fruit. The lawmakers in the distant capitol had suddenly become aware that such laws should be passed, and once started they passed them profusely.

Lear, knowing much about animals and nothing of politics, had come to believe that political bodies traveled in the same fashion as Manitou's endless circle, except that their circle was lacking in purpose. They passed laws only to pass others which defeated them. They had prohibited the running of dogs after bear, the one law Matt Lear most approved, but in their enthusiasm they had gone beyond—had prohibited the use of dogs altogether under the theory that their baying in the hills would so frighten the antlered animals as to drive them into the deep snow of the high peaks to starve. They had placed a bounty on all cougars with an eye to their extermination, then, by passing the no-dog law, had eliminated the possibility of that bounty ever being collected.

Matt Lear knew that this law was wrong; that the cougar kills at least a hundred head of game animals every year of his life, and Lear had his own positive ideas as to whether or not the few hours baying of the hounds in bringing a cougar to tree would frighten the lives from so many animals as that same tawny beast would kill in a single week.

Nevertheless, he persisted on Loupang's trail, hoping to bag him even without the aid of dogs. The two

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men at last tracked him to a strange and unnatural kill.

Loupang had been able to avoid men for so many years that these two persistent trailers bothered him not at all. He could not be trapped, for he rarely returned to a kill. He could not be poisoned, for he ate no meat other than that freshly killed by himself; so he went his way and easily avoided them.

He traveled one day through a valley of heavy lodgepole. A half-grown lion cub crossed in front of him and Loupang leaped for him. The big cat's teeth almost met in the slim body, and one wrench was sufficient to tear the life from the cub. A she cougar flashed into view, called to the spot by the death snarls of her offspring. Loupang dropped the cub and fled.

Matt Lear and Enright, following along on Loupang's trail, found the scene of the murder, its details plain to their experienced eyes. Matt Lear knew that old tom cougars will kill the young of their own kind.

From his mother, Metetse, last princess of the Shoshones, he had learned the reason for this. Manitou had made it known to his Shoshone children that the tawny slayer had no enemies in the animal world who could catch and kill him; therefore, this cannibal tendency was given to the males as the only provision against the too great increase of numbers in the savage tribe of Loupang.

That was the last time Matt Lear crossed Loupang's trail for many months. The fall hunting season was in full swing and the reports which sounded in the hills

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recalled to Loupang's mind the terrible experience on the cliff face. He left the Shoshone, crossing over the Wapiti Mountains to the high basins of the Thoroughfare and the Yellowstone.

Few men penetrated this country, the summer range of the elk herds, and Loupang found meat in abundance. He killed continually, an elk for each meal, and seldom returned to the spot. The elk migration back to the winter feed grounds on the Shoshone set in soon after his arrival, and in another month the great herds had disappeared.

Each year there were small bands of stragglers who lingered too long in the grassy basin, only to find the high passes blocked with snow when at last they decided to follow the herds. These drifted back to the summer range to try and winter through, and each new spring saw the high valleys dotted with the remains of the winter-killed.

But there were none to die of starvation this year. Loupang attended to that. The snow fell soft and deep, and soon the elk found no spot where feed could be obtained without pawing down through the white blanket for every bite. Loupang found easy killing among these weakened ones, and he wandered from place to place, leaving behind him a trail of death. By midwinter there were no elk left in the high country. Loupang was driven to feed upon the frozen carcasses of former victims. The scavenger beasts and the meat-eating birds had picked the bones of most of them, and he found little to eat.

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An occasional rabbit or grouse held life in him, but he was thin and gaunt from famine before he finally crossed out over the divide.

He wandered for two days along the side of the range and still found no meat. The winter was a hard one, and the elk had been forced farther down the country where the drifts were not so deep.

Near morning of the third day Loupang saw a movement ahead of him through the trees and crouched flat in the snow. It had been but a brief flash that he had seen, yet it meant meat. Twice more he caught the move, a vague flitting of white across white, a ghostly shadow merging with its background; a snowshoe hare, his coat in the pure white fur of winter, was moving toward him with an occasional lazy hop. Loupang pressed flat in the snow.

The rabbit knew it could not escape, and its scream of fear rang out before Loupang reached his mark—and the death cry was cut short as a killing forepaw drove the rabbit into the snow with a force that crushed his bones.

The victim weighed eight pounds, and Loupang devoured every shred and scrap of him, bones, hair, and all. Daylight found him still on the spot, resting comfortably and with new strength flowing into him from the heavy feed.

High up on the rims an old ram watched the breaking of the new day. He, too, was feeling the pinch of hunger. There were few winters that gave bighorn sheep cause for worry. The savage winds scoured the

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snow from the flat tops of the peaks and left the cured grass open to all that would feed there. But this winter differed from the most. The snow fell soft and clinging; the cold was not great and there came no winds to powder the wet mass and sweep it from the ridges. Instead it froze gradually as it lay, spread smooth and hard across the grass.

The old ram had lived long and his was the wisdom of large experience. He had known winters such as this before, and he knew what he must do to weather it. He despised the valleys—but he loved life. He had waited long for a break in the weather, and he could wait no longer. Past experience warned him to start at once before the snow grew deeper and his strength grew less. He dropped from his shelf, choosing a long, open ridge which swept away to the low country, and set out to buck the drifts toward the valleys.

A band of ewes and lambs on the bench above peered down at the moving speck. An old ewe started and led the way and the ram soon found ten smaller shapes single-filing along in the trail he had broken in the snow.

They bravely bucked the drifts in short rushes for hours at a stretch. They grew worn and tired, but were drawing ever closer to the lower feed.

Then a tawny shape glided from the timber, belly close to the snow, as Loupang crept upon his prey. There was small chance for him to reach them un-



CHARLES LIVINGSTON DILL

*"A killing forepaw drove the rabbit into the snow
with a force that crushed his bones."*

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observed, for he was in the open and stalking those to whom Manitou had given the all-seeing eyes.

Loupang had not moved ten yards from the shelter of the trees before his presence was noted. The old ram plunged desperately again and again in the vain hope that he would reach footing where he could run. Loupang's broad feet held him on the surface. He threw caution to the winds and angled in to head them. The ram had covered less than a hundred yards before the killer crashed upon him.

The ewes and lambs scattered in a blind panic, each one striving to plow out a trail to safety. One after another they were struck down as Loupang overhauled them.

Matt Lear was running his trap line in the hills when he happened to note the downward sweep of an eagle, followed by a second and a third. An irregular flight of magpies and ravens converged upon a distant ridge. He knew that the meat-eating birds were gathering to the feast and he headed for the spot.

The last remains of eleven sheep were scattered over a stretch of less than half a mile. Loupang's trail was scarcely an hour old and his victims had not yet stiffened from freezing. Matt Lear knew that with two good dogs he could put Loupang up a tree in one short chase, and as he looked down upon the bodies of a whole band of rare animals he wondered again at the stupidity of those who made the laws.

When he left the spot it was with the scalp and horns

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of the old ram; he would save that much at least. He headed straight down the country for his cabin.

Enright looked from the window and watched him come, wondering that he should have killed a ram at this time of year.

Ever since that first meeting years before, Matt Lear had given Enright all of the finest trophies he had taken. Enright's collection had been swelled by the gift of many a rare animal since that time when Lear had given him the antlers of Wapiti, the record bull. And Lear had long wished that he might add the pelt of Loupang, the big cougar, to the list of gifts; yet he had never resorted to the one sure way of taking him—the way prohibited by law. It was only the sight he had that day witnessed which led him to take the law into his own hands at last.

He tossed down the scalp and horns of the ram.

"The work of Loupang," he told Enright. "In a few weeks I will give you the pelt of the largest cougar that ever came out of these hills." And Enright knew Matt Lear so well that he never doubted the truth of this.

Within an hour Lear was once more on his way, his course leading straight down the valley. The snow did not permit of riding, and he traveled on webs. Some hours before daylight of the following morning he rapped upon the door of a cabin in the outskirts of the little settlement at the mouth of the valley, forty miles below his home. A few hours after dark of that same night Enright heard his webs crunching the surface of

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the frozen drifts and he came in, leading an ancient hound.

The old dog had once been the leader of a famous pack, but he lived now only in memories of the past. His head and body were torn and scarred with the marks of many old-time fights. His teeth were worn to stubs and his battling eyes were blurred with age.

For a week Matt Lear scoured the hills for a sight of Loupang's trail, leading the dog on a short rawhide leash. He crossed the tracks of two smaller lions but passed them by. It was Loupang, the largest of his tribe and the murderer of a whole band of bighorn sheep, for whom he hunted.

On the morning of the eighth day Lear stood on a high point and rested, looking down across the lower country. The bald, white ridges which lifted their crests above the heavy green of the spruce below him suddenly teemed with life. Elk and deer crossed and recrossed them, or bounded down their length. The antlered tribes seemed to have been lashed into mad fear by some sudden catastrophe—and the man knew that somewhere down there a cougar had made a kill.

An hour later he found it and the snow was padded thick with Loupang's big round prints. Lear followed the wandering trail that left it. Memories of by-gone days surged up in the old hound and sent the blood coursing through his veins with the vigor of youth. He strained at the end of his leash and plunged to break the restraining hold. Matt Lear stooped and slipped the leash and the dog was off on one last chase.

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Loupang heard a sudden note that chilled him. Dim memories of the past assailed him, and he knew the fear that he had known when his mother and sister died in this same way. The voice was the dread baying of a hound. Loupang was heavy with the hot meat of his recent kill and unfit to travel far, but he ran his best. The horrible music gained on him. The old hound had been noted for his voice, and it was the one thing age had not dulled in him. It rose clear and distinct as a notice of his whereabouts to guide the man who followed, then dropped to a slobbering bellow of eagerness to reach the end of the hot trail and close with his foe.

The killer heard another sound drifting through the baying of the hound, a wild, clear cry—the cry of a man. Matt Lear was putting all the power of his lungs into these calls of encouragement to the dog, urging the stanch old fighter to hold on. These cries pierced Loupang and weakened him. There was death for him in every note of the dog.

The big cat's bounds grew short and labored. The hound gained rapidly, and a sudden frenzied outburst close behind him warned Loupang that his trailer had sighted him. From the corner of one eye he saw the great hound bearing relentlessly down upon him and he scaled a tree. His enemy tried to climb it in his eagerness, then settled down and barked with clock-like regularity. Once again the high-pitched cry of man rang out, Matt Lear's answering call to the dog. Loupang had come to the end of his trail.

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Loupang knew the man was coming; he felt death crowding close upon him. He glared savagely at the hound who raged at the foot of the tree. His strength was ten times that of the dog. He had but to strike once and flee before the man arrived, but it was not in him to face a beast who would fight.

Loupang, the mighty hunter, felt his blood turn to water when he himself was hunted. Matt Lear's cry came again, nearer this time, and the tawny killer cringed in his tree, waiting certain death rather than give battle to an old and toothless hound.

Loupang had made his last track in the snow.

THE PALMATED PIONEER



AWTON the trophy-hunter, and Kennedy the guide, were the first two men to ponder over the strange case of the palmated pioneer. Later there were thousands who deliberated long upon this identical theme, but it fell to the lot of only those two men to know the Stranger.

It may have been unfavorable feed-conditions that led him to undertake the long journey. Perhaps he merely lost his bearings and imagined that he was headed for some other spot, which is unlikely in view of the fact that the sense of direction is almost unerring in animals of this kind. No man can say with assurance what the real cause of it was.

A possible solution is that he possessed more initiative than other young bulls and that having chanced across a few cows at the first of the running moon, he herded them away from their home range to avoid losing them to some bull mightier than himself; more plausible still is the supposition that the cows wandered off of their own accord and he merely followed them. It will ever be shrouded in mystery, for there was none to witness the start of his journey, and there was none to chronicle his arrival in a strange land.

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It is fairly certain, however, that he was a British Columbia moose, and that his route of march lay across the State of Montana, or possibly through Idaho.

Kennedy was the first man to discover his presence in the Land of Many Rivers. The guide's trap-line gave evidence of coming spring, for his catch yielded several pelts that were badly rubbed, and at least two that were shedders. He sprung his traps and cached them along his line. Idleness soon palled, and by the first of May he set forth to explore the little-known country over the divide at the head of the Yellowstone. He traveled on skis, and by starting early at the snow-line on the Shoshone side, he made a forced march across the divide and dropped below the snow on the Yellowstone slope in a single day.

He rolled in his blankets before a tiny fire, and with the first rays of dawn he breakfasted, hung up his skis to be picked up on the homeward trip, resumed his scanty pack and headed upstream through the broad bottoms of the Yellowstone. He noted a score of elk-carcases dotting the open meadows along his route, mute testimony to the fact that many of them had failed to pass out across the divides the previous fall and had been winter-killed. There were a few fresh elk-tracks marking the return of the first straggling bands to the summer range.

Kennedy reached the confluence of the Yellowstone and the Thoroughfare, plunged waist-deep into the latter and forded it, making his night camp on the shores of Bridger Lake, which nestled between the

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forks of the stream. He unwound a fishline from around his hat, cut a willow pole and prepared to catch his evening meal, then stopped and whistled with surprise as he viewed a great track in the mud of the lake bank. At first glance he thought that a bull elk must have passed that way, slipping at every stride, but closer inspection proved the hoof-print to be clear-cut and distinct. It was almost twice the size of any elk-track Kennedy had ever seen.

There were other tracks but little smaller than the first, and he knew that a number of beasts of a kind strange to him had spent some time in the vicinity. Many white men had passed that way since Jim Bridger had first reached the shores of the little lake that bears his name, but none of them had reported any beast that could leave a track such as Kennedy looked upon now. But this was a vast country, extending from the Shoshone to the Buffalo Fork of the Snake, and the few men who crossed through it could easily have missed finding signs of one small band of these rare animals. Kennedy scoured the country for a week and found much evidence that the strange beasts had wintered there. The tracks were old—not a trail on the Yellowstone that had been left less than a month before; but on the Thoroughfare the signs seemed a trifle fresher.

The bears had come from their dens, and the guide found the tracks of blacks, browns and grizzlies wandering aimlessly through the country. A series of open ridges, partly devoid of vegetation, pitched down

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to the shaking bogs in the bottoms a mile from the mouth of the Thoroughfare, and as Kennedy moved across them to keep out of the swamps, he noted tracks that appeared to have been made by a two-year-old black bear. No less than a dozen times in the course of a mile he crossed this trail on the dusty ridges, and along the shores of the beaver-ponds, and he wondered idly if all the two-year-olds in the hills had suddenly swarmed into this locality, or if one of them happened to think so well of it that he lingered in the vicinity instead of wandering on from place to place as is the habit of most bears in the spring.

The sign was increasingly difficult to read, for the elk-herds were returning to the summer feed, and the game-trails and meadows were littered with their tracks. Kennedy abandoned the search and started for home. As he came out upon the opposite bank of the stream, he spied a strange object slanting up through a patch of stunted brush, another similar one lying flat beyond it—and here Kennedy had found the first pair of moose-blades ever shed on the Thoroughfare. He wedged the mighty antlers in the forks of a tree and resumed his way, the mystery clear at last.

Even though he had never before looked upon a moose-track, he recognized the blades from descriptions by other men. He had half expected to find some undiscovered monsters, some last few survivors of a vanishing breed, only to learn now that the tracks had been made by an animal common in many parts, a stray bull moose, the only oddity about it all being

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his presence here five hundred miles from the natural range of his kind. He was but a visitor in a strange land, and Kennedy thought of him as the Stranger. He looked off up the Thoroughfare.

"He's up there," he said. "The Stranger is prowling around in the Thoroughfare bogs."

And this surmise was true, for the Stranger was at that very moment bedded comfortably in the edge of a moist thicket, the first bull moose that had ever left his tracks in the beaver-swamps of the Thoroughfare. And he was well content with his surroundings, for the long journey and its hardships were fresh in his mind.

Stranger had crossed much country that was not to his liking, for after once leaving his home range he had refused to turn back. He had crossed mighty snow-capped ranges where the winds shrieked and whistled, open valleys that afforded no cover and little feed, wide stretches of barren sage-covered flats and foothills, strips of broken bad-lands where the going was hard. He had tarried but little on the way, for the country over which he traveled had been partly settled, and any protracted stay in one locality would have been noted by men. The fact that there was not even a rumor of this pilgrimage of a bull moose and five cows was proof conclusive that he had pressed swiftly on in search of a land that was more in accord with his notions of what a moose country should be. There was none to report the exact point at which he first struck the Yellowstone, but he had found this stream to his liking. At the time Kennedy gave up his search

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for the stray bull, Stranger must have felt that after many vicissitudes of the trail he had reached a moose paradise at last.

He rose from his comfortable bed and moved out into an open meadow, turning his feet downstream along the little river toward its junction with the Yellowstone. Rank grass stood knee-deep in the meadows, and the water was very near the surface, sloshing around his feet as he walked. Where the surface was but a few inches lower, the grass-lands were replaced by quivering bogs covered with dense jungles of brush. Thickets of cottonwood alternated with clumps of spruce, the silvery aspen-trunks shimmering in bright contrast to their darker fellows.

Stranger splashed through beaver ponds, their waters backed up into thickets of willow and birch. Countless springs oozed from the slopes and formed spongy sidehill bogs in the matted tangles of spruce and fallen timber. Moose country—miles and miles of it! Near the junction of the two streams Stranger saw a moving object on a bare hillside that rose from the oozing marsh in which he waded, and he stopped.

He had seen bears before, grizzlies and blacks, and the light cinnamon and the dark brown color-phases of the Western black bear; but he had never seen a bear like the one that shuffled across the dusty hillside. It was a small bear, evidently but a two-year-old, and its pelt was very light brown, almost taffy-colored, and it glistened in the sun. Stranger loosed a coughing grunt, and the little bear stopped and peered down

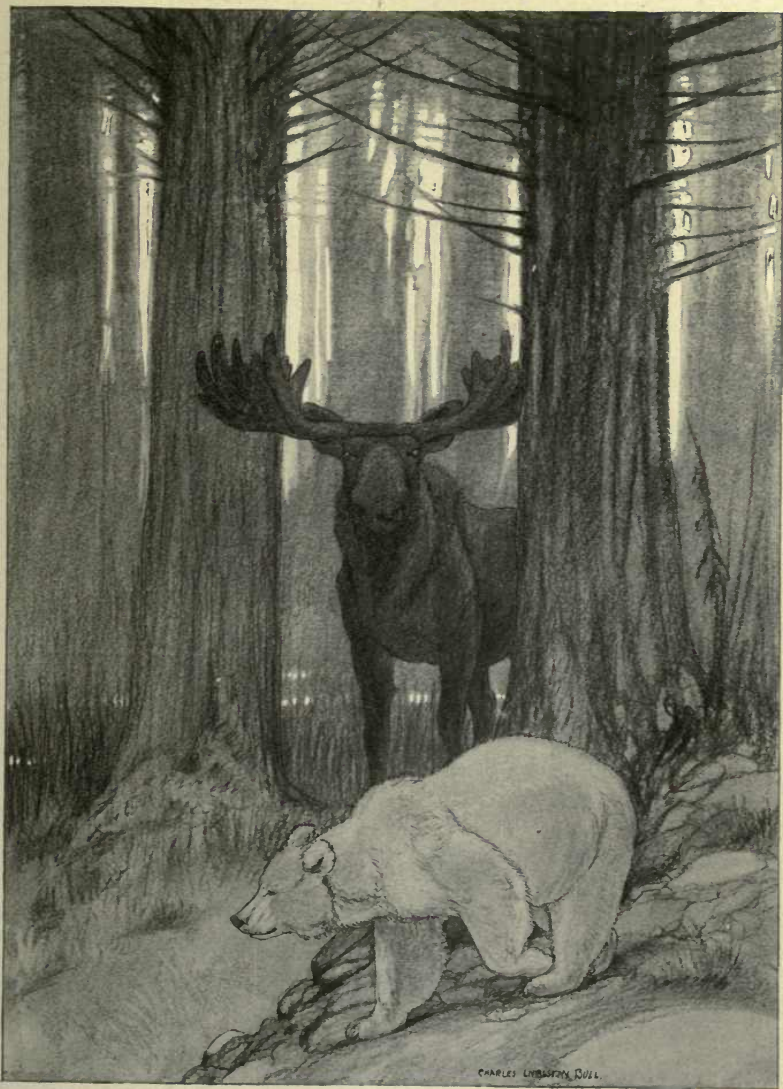
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toward him. His small, near-sighted eyes could scarcely make out the monster in the swamp, but his ears caught the gurgle of water and mud as Stranger shifted his position. He elevated his nose and tested the wind. A shifting eddy carried the moose-scent to him, an odor strange to him yet plainly announcing that it came from some beast that was no meat-eater, and he shuffled on.

The new antlers on Stranger's head had attained but a portion of their growth and looked strangely out of place on such a tremendous beast, but the matter of his appearance caused him little worry; his one concern was to protect the soft and tender horn growth from injury until it should mature.

All through the spring and summer he roamed widely on the Thoroughfare and the Yellowstone. There were no enemies to disturb him, and not once did he cross the man-scent in the hills. He no longer felt the necessity of seeking dense cover for concealment, and when so inclined he stalked abroad in the open parks in the full light of day.

When the days were bright and hot, he bedded in the moist thickets or in the edge of some marsh well back on the heavy spruce slopes. On cooler days and cloudy ones he frequently rested in the open meadows. Four of the five cows that had made the journey with him now had long-legged calves at their sides, and he often saw some of them as they fed out from the timber into the swamps at sunset or in the early dawn before sunrise. Several times he saw the strange taffy-



"He had seen bears before, grizzlies and blacks, and the light cinnamon and dark brown color-phases of the Western black bear; but he had never seen a bear like the one that shuffled across the hillside."

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colored bear, always near the same spot where the first meeting had occurred.

In midsummer a mountain lion, that terror of all antlered game, crept toward him as he lay in his bed. There was little wind, the air heavy and damp under the trees, and Stranger's nostrils drew one whiff of the rank scent of the killer. There was a sucking of mud as he lurched to his feet from the spongy bed, and the big cat that stalked him crouched flat without a move, hoping that his prey had mistaken the direction of the menace and would rush toward him in a panic and thus come within striking range, as so frequently happened among elk and deer.

True to his hopes, the killer saw his intended victim move a few steps in his direction—but such a victim! The beast before him towered almost seven feet at the shoulders, his massive neck covered with coarse hair and hide of exceeding thickness; the little eyes, set high up in the monstrous head, glared wickedly as Stranger gave vent to his coughing grunt and moved a few more paces in the direction from which he had detected the scent.

Stranger was moving within striking distance of the slayer, but not through accident, for he was deliberately seeking the beast that had disturbed his nap. For the first time the tawny cat had met an antlered animal that failed to flee in horrible fear from the first taint of his scent, and he executed a cringing retreat, keeping well out of the monster's sight. Stranger's antlers were yet too tender to be of any use, but the lion had

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no desire to engage a beast with such rangy legs and the will to deliver crushing blows with his ponderous hoofs.

Other cats soon learned that the cows of Stranger's kind, having no antlers whatever, were yet to be dreaded when roused by a slinking cougar that attempted to creep upon a calf—that these strangers did not fear them. This, coupled with the fact that the cat tribe had small liking for the swampy habitat of the moose, worked to protect them, and there was not one mortality in the ranks of the little band.

In the late summer the insect pests troubled Stranger somewhat. These were clouds of gnats and flies, humming swarms of mosquitoes floating over the swamps. The big moose made a bull-wallow by trampling the oozing mud of a spring, and in this he bedded, plastering his tender underparts and flanks with a coating of mud. He scattered these wallows throughout his range, and when in need of a fresh coat he repaired to the nearest one and covered himself with a new layer.

On the far side of the divide there was but one man, Kennedy, who suspected Stranger's presence on the Thoroughfare, and the guide had speculated long as to how he could best turn this knowledge to account. There was a collector named Lawton who came each year and offered prizes to the various guides who could show him rare animals of the hills to add to his hundreds of trophies. It would be this same Lawton who would pay the best for Kennedy's secret—not that moose were difficult to obtain, but surely the head of

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the first bull on the Thoroughfare would be a prize worth taking.

Kennedy acted as guide for one hunting party in the early fall, then crossed over the divide to make certain that the animal whose tracks he had seen still lingered there. As he turned up the Thoroughfare, he noted once more the numerous signs of a two-year-old bear, and he recalled having seen them in this same locality in the spring. He did not see Stranger but found many fresh trails and caught a distant glimpse of a cow moose and her calf in the edge of a beaver-swamp. This was all the evidence he needed, and turned back, knowing that he could locate the lone bull when he brought Lawton to the spot. He swung back across the bare ridges near the mouth of the stream to avoid the bogs—and stopped in his tracks and stared.

“Sun-bear!” he whispered. “The last sun-bear left alive!” He circled widely lest he disturb the small bear whose pelt gleamed in the rays of the sun. Here indeed was knowledge that would net him a pretty sum, for the collector had offered a thousand dollars for a guide who would put him within range of one of the fabled tribe of sun-bears.

The collector had not yet left the hills, and Kennedy told him the tale of the last taffy-colored bear and the first bull moose. The offer was renewed—a thousand for the bear and a tenth as much for the bull, this in addition to the customary guiding-fees. With two packhorses they set forth at once to cross the dim trails to the Thoroughfare. There was no time to lose, for

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the bear would soon retire to his winter den and sleep the long sleep until spring. The first drifting flakes of a storm flurried about them as they started, thickening so rapidly that a two-foot blanket of snow covered the hills by nightfall—and they had ascended only the first slopes of the divide.

All through the night the white crystals sifted through the trees and drifted deep across their blankets, and when the gray dawn came, they turned back, the hunt postponed until another year.

Lawton was a practical man, and he had small faith in the tales of fabled animals that frequently reached his ears, believing that naturalists would long since have discovered them. But to the legends of the sun-bears he had lent a credulous ear, his conclusions based on a variety of things that had come under his own observation.

Among the tribes that had once peopled the country there were tales of a small sun-bear that lived in open foothills and bad-land brakes. The early white settlers testified that some few of these animals survived in the low country after the coming of the whites. Lawton was well aware that the brown bear of the Western hills is but a color-phase of the black bear, ranging from rich browns to light cinnamon tints. But the men who had seen the sun-bear denied that he was but a freakishly light phase of these, asserting that specimens were never seen that had attained greater size than that of a two-year-old black, though

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worn and rounded teeth often attested the animal's great age.

These things, coupled with a pet theory of his own, had made a convert of Lawton, and he believed in the sun-bear of the past, but with small hope that he would ever look upon one in the present. Kennedy's tale of the bare hillside where this survivor made his home accorded well with Lawton's theory in regard to the origin and color of the bear, and he begrudged the long period that must elapse before he could investigate for himself and bring in the pelt of the last sun-bear, and the head of the first bull moose ever seen in the land of the Yellowstone.

But Stranger's scalp was safe for another extended period. The band of five cows had split, two remaining on the Thoroughfare while the rest headquartered on the main stream a few miles below. With the cold days of fall Stranger spent much time plowing through the swamps between these two bands. His broad palmated antlers had hardened and attained great size, with a spread of more than fifty inches, terrible weapons when driven by almost a ton of energy which he could put behind them, but he was the monarch of the valleys, his supremacy uncontested, for there was no other bull to question his authority.

The shining bear had sought winter quarters with the first heavy storms of late October, and Stranger saw no more of him. Every new snow packed the former layer solidly, and even the tall meadow-grass

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was buried deep. The elk-herds had moved out of this high basin country, and the whole frozen expanse of it was devoid of life, save for tracks of the little band of moose and of a few prowling bobcats, the white surface was unmarred by a single footprint other than those left by porcupines and snowshoe hares.

When the mating season of the five cows had passed. Stranger followed his natural inclination to range in search of others with whom the mating moon might possibly come later. He ascended the Yellowstone for a dozen miles to the last basin, where the main stream feathered out into a network of small tributaries that drained the encircling slopes. He found no cows of his own kind but discovered a drove of thirty elk that had failed to migrate to the winter range in time, and for two months he lingered in the willow thickets near where these ill-fated ones were making their last fight for life.

The big moose fared well, browsing on the tender twigs of willows, cottonwood, birch and a variety of other brush that reared above the snow. But—the elk were grazing animals that must have grass and could not subsist on twigs; so while Stranger waxed fat in the thickets, the elk grew gaunt and emaciated in the open meadows. They were forced to paw through the crust for every scant mouthful of grass. Day and night the crunching sound of their desperate pawing at the snow shattered the white silence of the valley. At the end of the first month Stranger chanced

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across five old cows bedded in the edge of the timber, too weak to rise, their feet sore and tender from pounding through the crust. Every day thereafter he saw more still shapes in the timber and fewer moving elk in the open parks.

The bull with the drove was the last to go. He was a splendid animal in his first prime, his great branching antlers bespeaking strength and vigor, announcing that he had wintered well the season past; but his vitality was slipping from him now. His pawing was without energy and of little avail. He braced his tottering legs and gazed at Stranger as the moose passed up the valley to the birch-clump that grew at the upper end of the meadow. For two days Stranger heard the feeble crunch of his hoofs; then this sound ceased. The noise of his own progress was now the only sign of life, and when a few days later he headed down the country, there were two bobcats prowling round a dark hulk in the snow, all that was left of the fallen lord of the elk-herd.

The two bands of cows and calves had drifted together on the Thoroughfare, and Stranger wintered with or near them. Late in February his antlers loosened and dropped from his skull, but he had small need for them, for his hoofs were adequate protection against any enemies he might meet. Spring found every moose in prime condition. The snow melted from the valleys, and Stranger could once more plow through open bogs and marshes while the higher hills

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still showed solid white. And as the season advanced, there were four new calves to swell the ranks of the moose herd.

The high country once more teemed with life. Beaver-colonies busily repaired breaks in their dams caused by the spring freshets from the melting drifts. Thousands of elk fed in the meadows. Ducks and geese swarmed on the surface of Bridger Lake, and nesting pairs chuckled contentedly on the reedy edge of the beaver-ponds, while silvery strings of huge white pelicans drifted up from Lake Yellowstone on lazy wings, looked the valleys over from above and winged back to the lake. And the taffy-colored bear had waked from his nap under the roots of an ancient spruce-stump and wandered ceaselessly back and forth across the dusty ridges of his restricted range.

Stranger milled through his adopted country at his pleasure, unafraid in this land where the man-scent was practically unknown, and lesser creatures gazed in awe at the massive newcomer whose size was almost twice that of the mightiest bull elk. He waded in the swamps and smaller lakes, thrusting his great head beneath the surface to pull water-plants from their moorings in the bottoms, and he plunged boldly into the larger lakes and streams and swam across them in sheer joy of the life and power pent up in his tremendous frame. And across the divide a man was busily planning how best to end that energy and reduce it to a lifeless hulk in the space of seconds.

Yet Kennedy was an observant man and opposed

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to needless slaughter of game. He had lived long and had seen the sacrifice of the buffalo herds, the crowding of the antelope bands back into the rough country at the foot of the hills, and the extermination of the beaver and otter on the Arkansas and the Platte.

In this country where the game-herds were making their last stand, the old man tempered his killing with judgment, and had foresworn the wastefulness of the early days. When fur-sign grew scarce on any part of his line, he pulled his traps, and he refrained from leaving them too long in any one beaver-swamp, not caring to trap too close and bag more than half of each colony on his line. The more he considered the case of the lone sun-bear, the more he disliked the idea of bringing about its end. It was possible that there might be more than one, that somewhere in the hills it would find a mate. The downfall of the moose would matter less, for his kind was plentiful farther north.

The winter had been long, the peaks drifted deep with snow, and Kennedy found the treacherous snow-combs too hazardous to cross in the early spring. The bear's pelt would be badly rubbed, and the bull would have long since shed his horns before a crossing could be made, and so the hunt must be postponed until the coming fall.

As the time approached, Kennedy found himself loath to set out to take the pelt of the bear and thus destroy the possibility of an increase of its kind, and when at last he piloted Lawton across the divide, it

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was only after extracting a promise that in event of locating the sun-bear it should not be killed. The collector could not shake this stand, his persuasive powers unequal to altering the old guide's determination to spare the life of the rare beast they sought, and he agreed at last, knowing that there was at least an opportunity to verify his belief in the legend of the shining bears, even though he could not bring in the pelt. The scalp of the moose he could take, but this trophy paled to insignificance beside the thought of the one which might have been his but for Kennedy's obstinacy.

Their route was not Kennedy's former one, but lay over the Rampart Pass instead, which would lead them down the game-trails of Open Creek to the head of the Thoroughfare and down that stream to the Yellowstone. As they stood on the far slope of the divide, Lawton could gaze off across an immense country, partly timbered, but with vast stretches of gently-rolling ridges free of trees, and broad upland pastures rank with grass; extensive meadows showed in the bottoms, and thousands of open sidehill parks—ample feed for two hundred thousand elk within a hundred miles: Kennedy estimated that perhaps seventy thousand head summered within that distance of where they stood.

The guide found old moose-sign within half a mile of the point where they first came out into the bottoms, evidence that part of the band sometimes ranged to the very head of the Thoroughfare, and Kennedy com-

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menced a systematic search for the bull. They hunted slowly, covering both sides of the stream and the smaller tributary valleys that opened into it. There were many moose-tracks, some old, others indicating fairly recent occupation. The traveling was hard, for Kennedy left no nook unexplored which might shelter the bull. The two men plowed through old drifts on the slopes, waded beaver-ponds and covered miles of quivering marshes, scrambled through acres of blow-downs and floundered in the mud of side-hill seeps—moose country, all of it.

The third day of these strenuous operations Kennedy heard the gurgling swish of water and the suck of feet being pulled from clinging mud as heavy beasts moved through a swamp ahead of them. He motioned Lawton, and they climbed swiftly up a shoulder of an adjacent hill and scanned the lowlands. A cow moose, a yearling and a calf stood contentedly in two feet of water and mud, the swamp brush even with the back of the old cow and almost concealing the calf from sight. A careful survey of the surrounding country failed to yield a fresh trail of the father of the herd, but there were tracks that Stranger had left less than a week before.

A mile farther downstream Kennedy entered a jungle of brush that rose above his head, and here he observed a curious thing that caused him to linger and study it. The brush grew straight-stemmed and erect to a height of three feet from the spongy surface. Above that point much of it was broken short or bent

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and splintered, many of the tips stripped off. Kennedy, though knowing little of the ways of moose, was yet a thorough woodsman, and he rightly read the evidence before his eyes. A band of moose had yarded in this thicket in midwinter when the drifts lay deep, and their hoofs had trampled the snow into a solid floor, the height of which could be determined by the fractured saplings tramped down even with the surface as they fed. The close-cropped twigs showed that in this fashion they had fared well.

As he resumed his way, he was conscious of the first doubt that had entered his mind as to the advisability of killing this lone bull. His thoughts hitherto had been exclusively confined to the saving of the last sun-bear and not at all concerned over the fate of the first bull moose seen in that locality. But now he regretted having undertaken the trip at all, and this feeling increased with the sight of every spot where brush testified to winter browsing of the moose-herd.

Lawton, on the contrary, had little enthusiasm for this protracted search for the moose, and he left the details of it to his guide; but his impatience to reach the vicinity where Kennedy had glimpsed the bear increased, and as he traveled, he turned over in his mind the theory of its origin.

He knew that it does not require many generations of selective breeding to perfect any one strain of an animal that has varied color-phases, that any shade can be made to throw true to type. In the baked

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foothills and light soil of the badlands the lighter shades of bears would blend well with their background and thus be better concealed from the eyes of their enemies than the blacks and the richer shades of browns. These latter had probably fallen first before the feathered shafts of the plain tribes, leaving a preponderance of light-colored bears in the low country, and of natural consequence the sun-bear type would have been perfected by enforced selective color-breeding. Thus they would be but another offshoot of the many-tinted browns, and there would be no difference in their skulls for scientists to note—the sunny pelts long since gone and only the legend left. Their inferior size could be accounted for in exactly the same way: the gradual deterioration of an inbred race.

If Kennedy had made no mistake in his observation, it might be that one last survivor—who may have wandered into the hills or who might prove to be only a throwback to an ancient strain—could yet be located. The fact that his range was in a strip of barren slopes and ridges so closely resembling the old foothill habitat of the fabled tribe was a hopeful sign, and the trophy-hunter fretted over the guide's stubborn refusal to kill the rare beast in event of their finding it.

It was not until the fifth day that Kennedy found a recent trace of the big bull. He reached a place where a dozen trails indicated that Stranger had used the spot for several days past, and his fresh tracks, made but a few hours before, led into a cottonwood

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jungle downstream. The wind was in Kennedy's face as he moved cautiously ahead, Lawton following close behind him, his interest roused at last when on the hot trail of his prey; but there was a sudden shift of the breeze, and the guide found it square at his back. He veered instantly from his course and ascended the slope to the right with intent to circle the swamp—but he was just too late. Two hundred yards below them, Stranger was roused from his slumber by the reeking taint of man-scent that reached his nostrils, a scent which he had known and dreaded in the days on his old home range. The two men heard the crashing of brush to mark his line of flight—and Stranger was gone.

Stranger fled straight downstream, holding to the dense thickets that accorded full concealment, then angled across the stream and climbed the steep slope that flanked it. He was not greatly alarmed. For the better part of two years he had had nothing to fear from man, and the sense of security he had come to feel had dulled his caution to an extent that it could not be thoroughly reinstated by one brief whiff of man-scent. He ran for half a mile at a swinging trot, slowed to a walk and within three miles he stopped, stood for a while facing suspiciously toward his back-track, circled to a point where both his nose and eyes would apprise him of enemies who followed it and bedded down.

Kennedy had not followed the trail with the wind

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at his back, but had traveled the ridges down to the mouth of the stream and swung square across the bottoms to find if the bull had gone out ahead of them and on the Yellowstone. They had rested, satisfied that they had outflanked their quarry and that Stranger was still above them. The wind held steadily downstream, and the evening of the second day they worked cautiously up against it. They paused in a clump of trees to view an immense bog ahead of them, stretches of marsh-grass and thickets of brush studded with groups of trees and sluggish ponds where the drainage-water stood in sites of ancient beaver colonies.

When the hoarse grunt reached them, Kennedy knelt behind a down-log in the edge of the trees and motioned Lawton down beside him.

He moved within three hundred yards—two hundred; and Kennedy dreaded the instant when the mighty bull should topple and fall at the report of Lawton's gun, for he had given his word that the collector could kill the moose. Then he suddenly touched Lawton's arm and pointed:

A small taffy-colored bear shuffled into sight across an open shoulder that rose from the bottoms, and the trophy-hunter riveted his gaze on the spot.

"It is true," he half whispered. "The last sun-bear!"

The bear's shuffling gait was in sharp contrast to the springy, powerful stride of the moose. Stranger

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drew still closer, and the bear neared a tongue of timber that reared from the shoulder; a single minute and he would be gone.

"Shoot!" Kennedy said hoarsely. "Drop him. Quick!" Lawton raised his gun, longing to turn it on the bear, but he too was a man of his word, and the rifle covered the moose. Kennedy shoved it aside. "No—the bear!" he ordered.

Lawton did not question but acted instantly on this advice, and at the roar of his gun, the last sun-bear collapsed, and the giant bull was running for cover at the sound. Lawton turned his gun on the fleeing shape but an iron hand clamped the barrel and swung it aloft.

"You have the one you wanted most," Kennedy said. "Let the other go."

The collector nodded, well satisfied with this last-minute substitution which had netted him the bear; and as they stripped off the shining pelt, he marveled at Kennedy's sudden change of front. It was not in keeping with what he knew of the old man's character, that the temptation of the prize-money should have swayed him when he thought it was slipping away; yet no other cause was apparent.

"I'll give you a trophy worth while," the guide announced. He strode away, and when he reappeared, he carried the antlers he had cached in the tree-fork the year before.

"The first pair of moose-blades ever shed on the Thoroughfare," he said. "The day will come when

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they'll mean to you what they mean to me right now, and they'll be the favorite of all those on your walls."

Stranger went back to his swamps, Kennedy to his trap-line, and Lawton to his scouring of the earth for rare trophies of the animal world. Because they were given by a valued friend, he kept the worthless antlers and had them mounted on a walnut base, and above them gleamed the pelt of the last sun-bear. It was perhaps another fifteen years before Lawton realized the significance of those two prizes and the words of the old guide who had made their attainment possible.

He had heard the reports of the dying of the Yellowstone elk-herds, their numbers dwindled by two thirds from starvation on their winter range that was now cropped close by the settlers' cows and sheep. He heard, too, that the Thoroughfare and the Yellowstone were fast being repopulated by a different kind of beasts, that giant moose ranged in hundreds on the headwaters of both streams, with many bands of them straying out both ways to take up quarters on the Shoshone and the Buffalo Fork of the Snake, scores of them now ranging in the safety of the Park. He heard that the moose wintered high in the summer range of the elk and flourished on the brush that the grazing elk-tribe could not use. There might have been other moose who followed the trail of Stranger, the palmated pioneer, but in any event he had been the first. And then Lawton knew!

The glistening pelt stood for the finish of a line

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that had outlived its usefulness in Nature's purpose—stood for decadence and decay, the end.

The shed horns stood for the beginning of a line that would continue—stood for that line and for the one man who had visioned its future, and for Stranger, the bull that led the way.

THE VANISHED SQUADRONS



HE white men had it from the Indians of the South who had it straight from Manitou, that the great golden crane derived its color from the fields of yellow metal a thousand sleeps to the unknown North where the rare bird nested. When the whooping cranes sailed out of the

North ahead of the chill winds of autumn and headed for the winter range in vast white squadrons, the snowy ranks were dotted at intervals by splashes of pure gold. The legend recited that the giant white whoopers, grandest birds of all America, invited each year a number of their golden relatives to make the long winter pilgrimage to the Southland. Manitou had let it be known to his children that the bird of gold was a lover of home, that those of the tribe who should spread their broad wings and set sail from their native heath to pioneer in new lands should nevermore return but would most certainly perish of sheer grief. And there was ample proof that the words of Manitou were words of surpassing wisdom. The youngest papoose had seen the splotches of buff scattered throughout the oncoming

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white hoards of autumn; the most ancient squaw in the teepees had yet to see glitter of a single pair of golden pinions among all the snowy ranks as the great birds moved north in the spring. When the clarion bugles of the whoopers floated from the winter feed-ground there sounded also the clear tones of the golden birds, identical with those of their white relatives except that the notes were broken and less sure, token of the heartsick longing for the distant home. So Manitou had named the white crane Latakinnee, the tempter or betrayer, while his gorgeous dupe was known as Matinak, the sacrifice.

The white men cared little for cranes and not at all for legend yet they knew for a fact that golden cranes traveled south with the whoopers while none but the white birds returned.

Nordquist had heard the legend. He too was a lover of home and he had found that baked plains and sultry winds were but poor substitutes for the snow-fields and crisp hill-country breezes of distant Norway so each year found him moving farther into the north. On the prairies of Alberta he overtook the legend but with a different version. The red men of the North held that all white cranes had at one time been golden. Manitou had made them the most wondrous of birds but with the understanding that they should dwell here always and with their beauty grace this spot which Manitou favored over all the rest. Once, a thousand moons ago, the tribe had departed to view far places. The great birds had lost the way and wandered, griev-

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ing for their home, and when after many months the flocks returned it was as if snow settled on the green spring prairies, for the weight of grief had bleached their plumage as the years bleach the hair of ancient squaws in the wigwams. Each year the tribe set forth to hunt for the golden plumes lost so many moons ago. The young birds born in this favored spot of Manitou still were garbed in buff but the foolish youngsters followed the older birds on the futile search and returned in the spring with their own feathers bleached dead-white.

As Nordquist gazed off across the marshy prairies these two legends, originating at opposite extremities of migration routes, were fresh in mind; for three hundred yards away a pair of giant white birds stalked majestically in the rank grass of a meadow and with them were two cranes of pure creamy buff. The flocks of white scattered throughout their plumage were indiscernible at that distance and they appeared all burnished gold in the rays of the morning sun. Here before him were Latakinee and Matinak, the betrayer and his victim.

Nordquist was not overly surprised for he had come to know that the sayings of Manitou, varying somewhat as to locality, were nevertheless far from being the absolute fantasies that most white men considered them. The big Norwegian was a man of the open, his living derived from the trap-line and the gun; and as befitted one of his calling he could read well the signs along his way. One of the white cranes speared

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a grass-frog and the golden bird nearest it advanced at a run, the wings trailing and the long neck outstretched, the rapier bill agape. The other fled before this rush and swallowed its prey. Most men would have read in this byplay only an attempt by one creature to deprive a fellow of his rightful catch but the Norwegian grunted with sudden understanding. The legends of both extremities of the migration route were suddenly cleared for him. For Nordquist read the move as the natural act of a bird now able to forage for itself but not far advanced beyond the stage when its food had been furnished, one who could not quite relinquish the idea that every morsel dangling from the bill of an adult was intended for his own consumption.

“Matinak, the golden, is but the son of Latakinee,” Nordquist said. “That is very sure.”

And in this surmise the man was correct. Color variation among wild things was not new to him. He had seen brown cubs following black she-bears through the hills and knew that the cinnamon was but a color-phase of the black; that the lustrous silver fox was but a freak melanistic specimen of the red. Albino ducks were not unknown to him and he had seen pinto blackbirds among flocks of their darker fellows. Here was variation of a different sort, the young of a species holding one color throughout their first year, then assuming the plumage of their elders; perhaps a lingering tendency to throw back to golden forebears as the cubs of the tawny cougar show spots at birth,

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evidence of reassertion of the blood of the spotted cats from which they sprang in the ages past.

He moved toward the four birds and Matinak, the young crane, detected his presence the instant his hat-brim cleared the rise of ground. Matinak uttered a clear silvery whoop and four pairs of mighty wings were spread with the sound. The long legs worked in unison with the flapping pinions to aid in the start, carrying the four great birds over the prairie at a flying run. After perhaps fifty yards the two white birds cleared the ground and their long legs trailed straight behind. Matinak and his sister still skimmed close to the surface of the prairie. At times, the young cranes cleared for fifty yards, only to drop their legs and race in tremendous strides for another start aloft. This style of locomotion was kept up for as far as Nordquist could see. Then a wave of the prairie shut them from his view and only the clear musical bugles floated back to mark the direction of their flight.

When Matinak came to rest he was some twelve miles from the spot where the Norwegian had jumped the crane family, the farthest he had yet traveled from the nesting ground. For the better part of an hour, as he stalked through the meadow-grass, he turned to look back in the direction from which he had come, standing almost motionless for minutes at a time. Then the menace was forgotten and he took up the everlasting search for food.

He advanced slowly, his head tilted from side to side as his sharp eyes peered down through the grass,

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and when one foot was lifted he seemed loath to set it down, holding it suspended for an instant above the grass-tops, then moving it slowly forward and down. His long neck moved gracefully with a gentle undulation forward and back. At last he poised on one foot, then took one swift step and drove his bill down through the grass, rose to swallow a plump grasshopper that had elected to trust concealment rather than flight. Matinak covered a distance of less than two hundred yards in an hour but in that time he had consumed well over a quart of hoppers. Then he tilted his head sidewise and listened attentively to a slight rustle in the grass, his eye trained on the spot. His spear was driven swiftly forward and to one side and he straightened with a meadow-mouse squirming at the point of it. Others scurried away from the dismantled nest with tiny squeaks. Matinak's sister ran toward him with trailing wings and open mouth, only to stop short and stab a fleeing mouse. The golden cranes exterminated the mouse family and turned over the downy nest to make sure that none hid beneath it. After the crane family had devoured a peck of grasshoppers, six nests of mice and sundry heads of wild grain Matinak drowsed in the center of a vast flat, his neck folded and the long bill resting snugly on his breast.

The warm noonday sun soothed him and he slept. A wheeling hawk screamed overhead and he opened his eyes for a brief survey. Hoppers tossed above the grass with a crackle of bright-colored wings, only to pitch down after a short erratic flight. Bees droned

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contentedly among the blossoms lifting from the meadow grass. But through it all at least one member of the family was ever alert. Occasionally one of Matinak's parents moved a few steps and made a tentative stab at some incautious insect, then stood for long with uplifted head and peered off in all directions across the plain. Suddenly the hen-crane stiffened to attention and fixed her eyes on a slight rustle in the grass tops a hundred yards downwind. The movement ceased as a cunning yellow hunter flattened with his nose between his paws. For a space of three minutes her eyes were fastened unblinkingly on the spot. Then the long neck sank slowly as the old crane relaxed. Ten seconds later her head was swiftly raised and again she detected that queer rippling furrow in the grass. It ceased but not before she had seen the pointed ears of a coyote sinking from view as the stalker crouched.

With her first clarion note of warning the yellow wolf broke cover and bore down on his intended prey. Matinak ran at top speed, the sweep of his broad wings aiding him. The rushing killer gained and with a final spurt sought to close with Matinak just as the golden crane, with a desperate effort, cleared the ground. The coyote leaped for him and the jaws snapped just beneath him as the dangling legs were lifted and thrust straight out behind. Had the coyote gained another ten yards before his discovery and been enabled to time his strike an instant earlier Matinak would have felt himself dragged back to earth by the gripping jaws

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clamped on his leg. For a hundred yards the yellow wolf kept his place beneath him as the young bird labored to rise and three times in that distance the coyote leaped for him but fell short. Then the golden crane drew ahead. The coyote stood and watched the great birds out of sight, trotted after them, but stopped to dig out a nest of mice and forget his recent failure.

The cranes sailed back to their nesting ground, a marshy meadow covering three hundred acres, merely a depression slightly lower than the surrounding prairies. In spots the rushes and marsh grass sprouted from the shallow water in heavy masses, at others sheets of water showed between lanes of vegetation, and there were oozy mud-flats where the water had receded with the dry days of summer. They alighted on a mud-bar far from any point which might conceal an enemy and for a space stood motionless, sweeping the country for signs of any possible menace. The marsh teemed with life. Four families of sandhill cranes foraged within view of Matinak, the adults a smooth soft gray while the young birds were richly clothed in dark brown. A dozen broods of big gray honkers floated on the open stretches or waddled across the mud-bars. Thousands of young ducks covered the marsh, the redheads, canvasbacks and scaups congregating in the deepest water to dive for food while the mallards, teal and gadwalls paddled in the shallows. A brood of widgeon and score of spoonbills skirted the edge of the mud-bar. Swarms of ducks that had been out feeding on the open prairies returned at sun-

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down and pitched down to join the feathered conclave. A coyote lifted his voice from a knoll and a score of voices answered. The squall of a questing fox sounded faintly from a distance. There were no sounds but the voices of the wild things in their native haunts, undisturbed by the works of man. Then the converse of the waterfowl ceased and a hush spread over the marsh. From a patch of timber a mile away came the clear ringing strokes of an ax, a man's voice raised in song. Then a tiny point of light pierced the gloom as Nordquist built his night-fire. A chill settled down over the marsh and during the night thousands of birds winged down from the North and joined those in the rushes.

With the first light of dawn the sharp notes of the ax sounded again and were kept up throughout the day as the Norwegian felled logs to build the cabin that was to serve as a base-camp for his winter's trapping.

The chill held throughout the day, the sun seemed to have lost its warmth, and Matinak saw more and more flocks pitch down out of the skies. A band of fifty sandhills dropped in the flats and the families on the marsh winged out to join their fellows. Just at dusk Matinak heard the far faint clangor of on-coming squadrons and straightened to peer off in the direction of the sound. A string of great white birds caught the last rays of the sun and sparkled in silvery relief against the graying sky, with here and there among the ranks a splash of burnished gold. The two

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old cranes rose to full height and extended their broad wings, slowly waving them to and fro. The squadron wheeled and headed directly toward these signalling kinsmen that loomed against the gray of the mud-bar.

It seemed to Nordquist, standing at the timber-edge, that the ranks descended in graceful steps, the foremost birds inclining down on planing wings, the others terraced in successive waves behind them. As each rank sheered down to within a few feet of the flat he could see the long legs dropped and thrust forward as the broad wings flared sharply to check the descent, then a few gentle flaps and the birds were down.

Day after day as the cold clamped down Matinak saw increasing numbers of southbound fliers scurrying down out of the North till the prairies teemed with a hundred varieties of wildfowl. Occasionally a dull roar rolled through the bottoms as Nordquist knocked down a duck or goose for meat. Then the flocks lifted for as far as Matinak's eye could reach, swinging low over the flats only to light at some other point. Then came the night when the chill bit deeper. Paper-ice formed in fluted sheets at the margins of still pools. All through the night the hiss of wings spoke of the cold wave moving down from the North and driving the migrants before it. In the morning the whooping cranes, now three hundred strong, rose as one and beat up against the wind till they had gained their height, then wheeled and headed into the south. Nordquist stood and watched them go. The fanciful

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legend recurred to him as he noted the golden buff of the young.

"The old birds are off on the search for the lost plumes of gold," he mused. "The young will lose their own and come back bleached white with grief. When the golden crane returns he will be Matinak no more but must be rechristened Latakinee, the great white whooper."

He noted the general exodus of flocks, one variety after another lifting as at a signal and moving out.

"It will freeze hard tonight," he said. "So much the better. Fur will soon be prime." And that night the marsh was coated with half an inch of ice.

Matinak's travels had been mainly confined to short flights, skimming close above the surface of the earth, first with his family in escaping various enemies that neared them, later with the flocks to different feed-grounds, and never before had he attained such a distance aloft. The world spread out for him to view it and he added his voice to the clangor of the hundreds. Other feathered hosts traveled above, and to either side. When the cranes were silent the soft notes of migrating plover floated down from on high, the clear cry of the curlew and the whistle of the jacksnipe and yellowlegs. A bank of trumpeter swans contributed a medley of silvery notes, the birds themselves out of sight. A thousand feet below him were vast strings of big gray geese.

For hours the mob of cranes held on without a break.

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Then the front ranks pitched sharply. The steady forward drift was slowed and they sailed down in stair-step spirals toward the moving white dots five thousand feet below. But eventually the ranks steadied and moved on with even beats, rising gradually. Matinak peered down on hundreds of antelope bunched and drifting south ahead of the coming storm. The cranes had decoyed to the white flash of the rump patches, as redhead or canvasback will frequently decoy to floating chunks of wood. The former height was not essayed and the whoopers swept on a few thousand feet above the plains.

When the rays of the sun were slanting the foremost ranks once again checked their velocity. The voices clanged forth in inquiry. The sheen of water extended for miles, broken by strips of rushes and broad expanses of grassy meadows. Far ahead and below a thousand white spots loomed against the prairie. These waved a welcome signal of security and Matinak planed down to join the legions of his fellows. The gold and white royalty of the air fed in great banks across the meadows, and everywhere there was life in overwhelming profusion. A hundred thousand Canada geese grazed the tender shoots of grass along with great bands of their relatives the cacklers, exact duplicates in miniature of the big gray honkers. Banks of white geese covered vast stretches of the prairies. Mallards lifted in black swarms to settle a few yards farther on. Upland and golden plovers stalked with jacksnipe and giant curlews. A thousand sand-

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hill cranes alighted on a sand-knoll and performed their war dance, the greatest comedy of birdland, for the entertainment of all who would witness. Silhouetted against the sky these stately birds danced and capered, greeting one another with sweeping bows, then advancing with lame-duck lurches accompanied by flirts of one trailing wing, only to skip back with stiff-legged hops. The stretches of grasslands free of water were alive with prairie hens and sharp-tailed grouse.

The whoopers rose with a deafening blare of trumpets and repaired to the oozy surface of a mud-flat for the night. The margins of every sheet of water seemed to crawl with life as the countless yellowlegs and turnstones competed with stately avocets and willets for the insects buried in the mud. The water itself teemed with ducks. Redheads, canvasbacks and bluebills, divers all, were congregated in the deeper pools. Black flotillas of coots, covering hundreds of acres, paddled in unison and as night shut down these birds balled up in compact rafts, their masses so densely packed that an overhead bird could scarce distinguish between these coot-rafts and the scattered, flat islands that lifted above the marsh.

To all experienced migrants this balling up of the coots announced that the birds were about to move on before a cold wave that was on the way. All through the night the feathered hosts streamed down in millions. Never a passing minute but was marked by the soft wing-whistles of slow-flying ducks, then the

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churning splash as they settled in thousands on the water. Then would come a humming screech as some flock of canvasback or bluebills hurtled through the night, the scream of wings hissing on the turns as they circled to check their speed, the skitter of their bodies propelled across the surface of the water by the remaining velocity of their headlong flight. A thousand muskrat houses loomed as darker blots in the obscurity. Hundreds of mink prowled the marsh and took their toll from the feathered hordes.

An hour before sun-up some few flocks raised at the splashes that marked the progress of heavy bodies through the marsh, but the most of them settled again. The volume of voices rose as the geese discussed the best route to the upland feed-ground and the ducks and shore-birds greeted the coming day. Rosy streaks showed in the east and the early morning was ripped through by the bellow of black powder as some market gunner touched off a four gauge and poured half a pound of shot through a great raft of redheads massed before his blind. 'The marsh quivered to a thunderous roar as a million pairs of wings fanned the air as one. Black swarms of birds wheeled low across the bottoms and from a dozen points the red streaks spurted skyward as the market hunters took their toll.

Matinak passed directly over a dark blot in the rushes, its appearance identical with that of the rat-houses scattered in such profusion. A red flash leaped up for him out of the gloom below and his father collapsed. Three times the gun crashed, followed

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by the impact of solid bodies striking the water as the heavy charges of shot ripped through the huddled thousands. Two cranes near Matinak set their wings and sailed off in the darkness. Others struggled in mid air with dangling legs and curiously arched necks, striving to hold their crippled bodies aloft. When the ranks of whoopers cleared the marsh Matinak's white father and his golden sister were missing from the family group.

All through the day the dull boom of the shotguns drifted up to Matinak's ears as he sailed majestically southward, five thousand feet in the air. No strip of marshland or winding river, no creek-bed or prairie lake but held its quota of those who gunned for the market. The white cranes were no lovers of cold and they held on while other species tarried. After the lapse of a week the white-and-gold squadrons settled on sandy barrens where long fingers of the sea reached back to the seeping marshes that extended interminably. Untold thousands of cranes were there before them and each new day brought fresh arrivals. The great flocks broke up into small detachments and on the morning after arrival Matinak set sail with his mother and a score of others for the desert sand dunes back from the coast. Here he found the little red plums, scattering patches of wild grains and many varieties of low-grown fruits. He stuffed to repletion on the sand-hill plums that had dropped to the ground at the edge of the thickets. Then, for an hour, he drowsed in a vast flat, the nearest cover some three

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hundred yards away. When the pangs of hunger again assailed the little band of whoopers they spread out and moved toward the nearest clump of wild plums feeding enroute on bright-winged hoppers and the swift-darting sand lizards.

Matinak neared the thicket and thrust his head well inside the bushes to retrieve a ripe plum that reposed on the ground three feet from the edge. The forward thrust was halted as his sharp eye detected shadowy movement ten feet to his right. A long crouching body moved down a trail through the thicket without a sound. The sun-spots dappling down through the leaves blended with the hide of the spotted cat. Matinak withdrew his head, sounded the warning whoop and headed out across the flat. With his first bugle-note every crane was in motion, their clanging voices added to his own. Matinak felt again the handicap that had so nearly resulted in his death at the jaws of the coyote on the Alberta prairies so short a time before—the inability to rise without any great celerity. His initial rise must be aided by a running flight, the use of both legs and wings to gather speed for the take-off, then a labored flapping to attain a height of safety. A great spotted cat broke cover at the edge of the thicket and rushed the little gang of cranes. Matinak cleared after forty yards. His long legs ceased their swinging stride and trailed out straight behind him. It would be another such span before his wings lifted him beyond striking distance from the ground. A long shape launched into the air as the cat

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drove for the crane next him. Killer and victim struck the earth together in a rolling heap of spotted hide and eddies of white feathers. The cat lifted his head, the red tongue circling his jaws to free them of the blood spurted in his face from the single savage crunch at the whooper's neck. For a full minute he glared about him, one forepaw holding down the flapping thing that a moment past had been a wonderful creature of snowy plumes. Then he seized the bird and bore it toward the thicket to gorge in the seclusion of the matted tangle of brush.

Always this inability to rise suddenly was the one greatest weakness of Matinak's tribe. He could not toss from the surface of the water in full flight after the manner of swift-flying ducks, as if propelled by a spring. He could not flit through dense cover as some of the smaller ground-birds. His was not the abrupt corkscrew flight of the jacksnipe nor could he launch his heavy body with one mighty backward thrust of feet. The lagging take-off made his kind fair prey for the coyotes of Alberta and the many different cats of Mexico; later also for man when this weakness was recognized and the knowledge put to bloody use.

But here in the winter range Matinak was comparatively safe from all save his natural enemies of the wild. One after another the different varieties of ducks, geese and shore-birds that had started south with his own kind made their appearance after lagging on the way. The hunters were out in force to meet them but most of the market gunning was carried on

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to the north of Matinak's range. Those who shot in his neighborhood confined their operations mainly to the lagoons where the duck-rafts congregated; and the white cranes held mainly to the sand dunes or fed on the tide-swept flats where food in many forms was washed up by the sea and left stranded on the sands. Thus there were few deaths at the hands of men.

After a period of five months a vague restlessness seized the young crane. He had been vastly content with this land of sunshine and food in plenty, perhaps had never considered leaving it, but now he felt the urge to spread his wings and sail steadily for days at a great height from the earth. Above him a gang of white cranes moved in a wide ascending spiral, as if they trooped in endless processions up a winding stairway, a maneuver in the air as unique in its way as the war-dance of their gray relatives, the sandhills. Their mighty clangor filled the air as the chiming church-bells of a hundred villages all loosed at once. Matinak's mother issued a peremptory bugle-note and every crane with her joined in as they spread their wings and ran along the sands for the take-off of a journey of two thousand miles. They overhauled and passed other species that had departed before them but had tarried for weeks enroute. The northward pilgrimage was no different from that of a few months before when the flocks had moved into the south. The market hunters were out in force along the flyways to harass the return migration of early spring and the never-ending roll of the shotguns floated up to Matinak



*"A long shape launched into the air as the cat
drove for the crane."*

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every hour of the day. As the white legions moved north there were thousands of mated pairs dropping out and sailing away at tangents to the general flight, headed for old nesting grounds in Nebraska and Iowa, Minnesota and both Dakotas.

Matinak and his mother dropped out and pitched down to the broad marsh in the Alberta prairies where the young crane had first seen the light. Their glad whoops reached the ears of the big Norwegian and he stood at the edge of the timber and watched the return. For a month he observed the habits of the two white birds who stood almost as tall as himself, not knowing old from young, and endeavoring to determine which two of the family had returned. He observed that they were not mated, merely holding together for association of kind.

"It is the young bird who left in the fall as Matinak the golden crane," Nordquist eventually decided. "He has returned as Latakiee, the white whooper, after losing his golden plumes. The other bird is one of the old pair. The other two of the family failed to survive the journey. The young bird should be re-christened since the moult."

Thereafter he spoke of the young crane as Latakiee. The red men of the North had it straight from Manitou that when once a pair of the white cranes was broken, the survivor ever after refused to mate. Also it was handed down that these birds—living to a ripe old age, well over a century it was said—never mated and reared young till the summer of their third year.

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The meat of the whooping crane was esteemed as a delicacy and the Norwegian would have thought little of dropping one of them for his table. It was curiosity rather than sentiment which led him to hold his hand. Nordquist felt always the urge to know the truth concerning the ways of the wild folks. Having already solved the fable of the golden plumes he wished to determine if these other things were true. Also he desired to know the reason for the disparity in numbers between the white birds and the gold, for when the passing hosts had come clanging overhead the preceding fall he had observed that there was but one young bird to every four adults.

"We shall see," he prophesied; and elected not to turn his gun upon the cranes.

Perhaps if lean days had come he would have craved meat above knowledge and Latakiee would have roasted in his oven, but there was food in plenty. The marshes teemed with swarms of ducks and geese and there were eggs by the millions for the taking. The prairies were alive with pinnated and sharp-tail grouse. Antelope ranged in tens of thousands and there were elk and deer in the timbered stretches; so Latakiee and his mother were permitted to summer without a shot being fired at them and they saw again the coming of the white-and-gold hordes in the fall. When they returned in the spring there were but the two of them.

"So," said Nordquist, Manitou informed his children well. The she-crane refuses to take to herself a mate. That much at least is true."

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And later—his curiosity on this point set at rest and in its stead a mounting desire to test the truth of the fabled succulence of the flesh of the whooping crane—he shot down the old bird and made a great roast of her. Any other man would have done the same and the Norwegian was no worse than his fellows; perhaps even better than most for he had held his hand for a year.

The following spring Latakinnee brought back with him a mate, a young creature all of sparkling white except for the black edging of her wings, the badge of mourning for the golden plumes once hers, now lost forever. The two cranes were aware of their beauty and proud of it. As they settled after their long flight they ruffled their feathers softly, then for an hour preened their shining plumage with deft touches of their long bills as a woman dresses her shining tresses with deft touches of comb and brush. Not until assured that no single feather remained misplaced did the royal pair stalk in search of food.

Latakinnee was very devoted to his lovely consort. He assisted in fashioning a nest of rushes on a grassy island in the marsh. Later his mate deposited two great eggs in this shelter and thereafter refused to accompany him on all but the shortest trips. At last Latakinnee returned to the nest to find the two eggs gone and in their stead two scrawny creatures seemingly all legs and necks, sprawling in unlovely semi-nakedness relieved only by patches of fluff and great blue pinfeathers. These ungainly squirmers grew with un-

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believable rapidity till they overflowed the nest, then were able to rise on spraddling unsteady legs. At this period Latakinee followed the example of his mate and brought food to supply the ravenous demands of his young.

Nordquist looked out across the marsh and observed what at first glance appeared to be a struggle between Latakinee and some creature that had swallowed his head. Then he saw that the he-crane was merely feeding a dull-colored youngster, his long bill and half his head obscured from sight within the gaping maw of his offspring as he rammed home the morsel and thrust it twelve inches down the infant's throat. This style of taking on nourishment amused the Norwegian and he frequently observed the process from afar. And while he watched a change came over the young birds day by day. Their drab unloveliness was replaced by maturing plumes till at last they stood forth in coats of creamy buff splashed with tiny flecks of white.

One unexplained point alone remained to pique Nordquist's interest. If each pair reared two young, then why such a scarcity of young birds in the flocks? Surely not all birds were born to buff coats. Perhaps this varied and the majority of the young birds were white. The next year he would see. Latakinee, for just as long as he roused interest in the man who lived adjacent to the nesting ground, was safe in his summer home.

Nordquist had enlarged the scope of his activities

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and in addition to the yield of his own trapline he now traded for the catch of others, his cabin a free-trader's post. In the spring the red trappers journeyed to the post to barter their furs for the trinkets of the white man. Many families lingered in the vicinity till time to set out once more on the trapline, meanwhile accumulating a debt with the trader to be settled off later with fur. Those who summered near the post lived off the country, and to the children of Manitou all living things are food.

The two cranes had repaired the nest on the island for the home of their second mated year. Latakinnee one day observed an irregular line of squaws, burdened with large baskets, advancing across the marsh toward the retreat of his mate. Hundreds of distracted ducks and geese buzzed low over the bottoms, uttering cries of distress as their nests were rifled and their eggs added to the sagging weight in the baskets. He saw his mate rise from the grass and limp away before a squaw, trailing one wing and lurching in her stride. She fell to the ground and quivered with the tremors of approaching death. The stolid squaw paid no heed but stooped and added two great eggs to those already lodged in her pack. The hen-crane rose and Latakinnee joined her. When the marsh was clear of invaders they returned but the nest was cold and empty. Throughout the summer they felt the emptiness of life, the loss of natural occupation, no mouths to feed save their own. The squaws netted thousands of young ducks and geese in the marshes while the

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bucks potted whole coveys of half grown chickens at a single shot in the high grass of the meadows. But no shot had been directed at the cranes. Nordquist had given orders to the foragers to fire no gun at the royal pair. Manitou had endowed his children with literal minds. They obeyed the white trader's instructions to the letter and fired not at Latakinnee or his mate—merely rifled the nest. The white man had said no word against this.

Nordquist had decided that the great cranes nested only every second year, thus accounting for the scarcity of young birds, when he chanced to overhear a remark indicating that the pair had actually nested but that their eggs had gone to feed the hungry bellies of the red sons of Manitou. He therefore issued another order, explicit and far-reaching, to cover the coming year, when neither birds nor nest should be molested.

The following spring Latakinnee and his mate found a new nest-site some little distance from their first. More squaws scoured the marsh for eggs and more bucks hunted in the timber and on the prairies but the nest was undisturbed. When the two young birds blossomed forth in buff plumage Nordquist stood and gazed at them. He pushed the fingers of a great hand through his mop of tawny hair as he reflected, and the sunlight struck a spark from hair that was almost a match for the golden birds. It must be that the egg-gathering habit of the squaws, nests rifled by predatory animals and so on, had to do with the scarcity of young birds in the flocks, he mused. Mated pairs once

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broken refused to mate again; the young not nesting till their third summer. All those things contributed to the answer. So deciding, he shrugged indifferently and turned away, his interest in the matter ended; and with the cessation of the trader's interest the life of the pair was proportionately endangered. But the literal-mindedness of the red hunters, which at first had acted to upset the nesting arrangements of Latakinnee's second summer of fatherhood, reacted now to save him. The white trader had said the great cranes should be undisturbed. Never had he rescinded that order. The bird then, was the Norwegian's very high Totem. Was not his hair the color of the young birds; and would it not one day be white? Assuredly these things were true. It must be so. And thus Nordquist was unwittingly the salvation of Latakinnee and his mate.

For a score of years the two royal birds nested on the flat grassy islands of the marsh. Occasionally Nordquist observed them casually, as he would have viewed a blue goose or a curlew, any bird that was growing rare. The prairies of Alberta were settling up as the great plains of the States to the southward had long since been settled. His business had expanded and he now carried supplies for the few whites that had homesteaded so far north as his post. He owned forty thousand acres of land in a body, the marsh a part of his pastures. He no longer hunted for his own meat. Mostly it was supplied by those who came in to trade, or from one of his own fat beeves. The legend of the

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golden cranes had long since been lost in the misty past but always he thought of it when the white-and-gold legions came down in the fall. He noted idly that they were legions no longer. There were hundreds now instead of tens of thousands, the same as there were scores of ducks and geese nesting in the marsh where a few years back there were acres of nests. The antelope were gone from the plains and the elk and deer were fast going from the timber. He had been far too busy to note these transitions; but at last he had attained his goal in life and had leisure in which to reflect. He stood with bared head in the open air and his hair showed white. Two sturdy sons stood with him and their bushy locks were tawny gold. Truly the days of youth were golden days, he mused. And far out in the marsh his eye centered on two white specks against the green; Latakinee and his mate ministering to the wants of a single young bird of gold.

"We must bag those birds as soon as the young crane gets full plumage," one of the sons observed. "They're getting rare. We should have one of each color mounted for the house. We've been waiting for five years now but every season for that long a fox or coyote has broken up the nest, the cows tramped the eggs or an eagle nailed the young birds before they were feathered out. This is the first to reach that size in many years. A few more days now and we'll bring them in."

A tardy and unsuspected strain of sentiment welled up in Nordquist's heart. Latakinee and himself were

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old residents. The crane had been born to his golden plumes of youth on that day long past when Nordquist, his tawny hair a match for the plumage of the bird, had first looked upon this spot that was home to him.

"Let them live," he said. "They're old friends of mine. The marsh wouldn't seem the same old place of summers without that pair nesting there. Get your specimens somewhere else."

In the fall he watched with quickened interest as Latakinee's family joined the flocks. Only a few scattered hundreds passed through and Nordquist noted that the young birds were but one in ten.

Latakinee was an extremely wary crane, wise from long experience, and he took the lead of the gang of twenty with which he elected to travel. In past years thousands of birds had joined the flocks, those that had nested to the southward in the States. They nested there no longer and this season not a single bird rose to swell their ranks after the Canadian line was crossed. Latakinee would alight only in the most desolate spots, far from human habitation, and such havens were increasingly hard to find. The country was farmed from end to end. In the mid-afternoon of the first day's flight he swooped majestically toward an expansive flat where the season past his charges had spent the night. A sod-house loomed near a brackish pond and three frame shacks showed here and there. He rose again and held on for another hundred miles and sailed down to a second refuge, a mud-flat in its center. Just at dusk a man appeared, a mere speck two miles

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away, and Latakinnee started his take-off with a flapping run. It was no longer merely the gunner with a shot-gun, implement of short range, that he must avoid. Of late years he had often heard the dull plop of lead on flesh as some crane near him collapsed and the thin, keen crack of a high-power rifle sounded from some clump of brush or wave of ground hundreds of yards away. Now he rose the instant a man appeared in the distance.

The little gang of cranes spent the night on a mud-flat. Above them sounded the notes of the flocks streaming down from the north. There were still thousands of ducks and geese, perhaps one to every hundred that had winged south on Latakinnee's first flight. The notes of a single curlew sounded from the prairie. A few scores of shore-birds waded the shallows. There came no more the wild sweet music of unseen hordes of whistling and trumpeter swans. The millions of chickens were gone from the plains. The piping flute of scattering plover feeding in the meadows sounded thin and lonely. With the first gray dawn the sharp bark of smokeless powder was flung across the flat. A few scattering splashes indicated ducks rising from the water and the faint purr of wings hissed in the early morning light as the water-fowl rose as one.

The cranes skimmed low across the flat and gradually attained their height. Late in the day Latakinnee peered below in the vain hope of sighting white specks that should flap a safety-signal of waving pinions, a

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welcome from brothers of his kind. A hundred times in the past he had decoyed to the moving specks that were antelope, but now even this temporary encouragement was denied him, for the antelope was no more. He must choose his landing field unaided.

At dusk he led the way down to a bit of rolling pasture land with a few shallow sheets of surface water accumulated in depressions from recent rains. Three men saw the stately descent of the royalty of the air and later there were keen eyes peering through powerful glasses from a point of vantage a mile away. No man showed even his head for these wary birds were sharp of eye.

Well into the night these three men laid their plans. The cranes would not move far, for it was known to them that men sometimes lay hidden at night after seeing a flock of rare whoopers come to earth waiting for the birds to feed within range in the moonlight. The increasing scarcity of Latakinee's kind had placed a value on his skin as a trophy. Few museums held a specimen of the golden young birds that a score of years before had been so plentiful as to be scarcely worth picking up. Now the skin of a golden crane was listed at a hundred dollars, a wing-tipped bird of any age at three times that much when delivered alive to those who dealt in animals and birds to supply the parks.

The three men parted.

"Remember," one advised. "Shoot at the corners, once you're well under them. They've got almost a

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nine-foot spread of wings, those boys. They'll show up against the sky. Don't shoot to center them if you can help. Shoot at the corners and smash a wing-bone. It's easy with slow-fliers as big as them.

An hour before daylight three horsemen converged toward the spot where the whoopers fed. The approach was cautious and slow, the horses moving at a slow, irregular walk with many halts, the sound of their hoofs no different from that of the others grazing in the pasture. The sky grayed in the east and Latakinnee's eyes detected a crouching hump on the back of a horse held in silhouette against the sky two hundred yards away. His ringing bugle set every crane in motion and they were off, with the horses pounding down behind them. Latakinnee swerved from the sound of a running horse ahead and to the right of him. He swerved again as drumming hoofbeats bore in from the left. Then a horse was clattering twenty yards below him and the swift roll of a pump-gun jarred his ears as the rider shot from the saddle at the huddled mob of cranes against the sky.

Latakinnee's son crumpled and went down in a whirling mass of golden feathers as a well-directed charge of shot shattered a wing-bone. A second load caught his mate fairly in the breast and she died in mid-air. A second gun joined the first and the rider emptied it. Then the cranes distanced the horsemen and gradually rose to safety.

Behind them the hunters were picking up five dead cranes after capturing three wing-tipped cripples that

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put up a strenuous fight, Latakinnee's golden son among the three, to be later shipped to the live bird markets. Today, his plumes bleached white, he parades in a famous park before the wondering thousands, and may perhaps live on for a century as one of the last survivors of a vanished race.

At high noon Latakinnee returned, a mere silver speck against the sky, and for three days and nights his trumpet sounded hopefully as he sought the mate that had sailed the blue with him for a fourth of a century. A dozen times he came to earth and the hunters tried for him but failed. Then his note was no longer heard. He had gone on to the south in the wake of the flocks.

In the spring Nordquist saw a single white crane sail down to the marsh and he knew that no more young would grace it.

White settlers flocked in through the years and covered the fertile prairies of Alberta. [Hundreds gained the Norwegian's permission to hunt on his pasture marsh but each was instructed to fire no shot at the lone whooping crane. Many looked with covetous eyes upon this rare creature but all feared to take a chance. Each year the clanging hosts grew fewer and for five seasons not a single young bird was seen. Then came a fall when Latakinnee moved south with a dozen cranes. Hunters said that less than fifty whoopers came through. Nordquist shook his head doubtfully. All down the flyway hunters were utilizing the weakness of the cranes, their inability

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to make a swift ascent, and surrounding them with swift running horses before dawn. The price of a single bird was worth a dozen trials.

But Latakinee returned in the spring. All through the warm months he fed in solitary grandeur through this meadow of memories. The chill days came and he waited. Often he spread his wings and slowly waved the sign of welcome and safe landing fields, then waited hopefully for a bugle greeting from on high. It was two weeks past his usual time for starting when at last he rose and circled high above the marsh. He made trial trips to the east and west, only to return and circle uncertainly, lighting again on the old nest-ground. Then he rose and tried to the north.

An hour later Nordquist glanced aloft as a sound floated down to him. Latakinee's wavering uncertainty had vanished and the old crane headed steadily into the south. Perhaps he kept time to the measured beats of ten thousand mighty pinions winging with him and thought the clanging voices of the vanished squadrons rose in accompaniment to his own. For his wild clear trumpet pealed forth bravely as Nordquist stood and watched him start on the last long pilgrimage in search of the golden plumes.

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PRIMITIVE peoples have ever shown a tendency for apt nomenclature. There must be sufficient reason to justify the bestowing of a title. Many moons ago an infant chief of the Bannocks lived well into his second summer without giving evidence of any outstanding characteristic and, of natural consequence, remaining without a name. The wise men of the Bannocks watched him eagerly but he neither snarled like the bobcat when angry nor sunk his tiny nails into the soft flesh of his mother like the young of the cougar. His infantile wails were no more akin to the leering howls of the coyote than they were to the squall of the red fox or the hoot of the big gray owls. His father, war chief of all the Bannocks, was much mortified and would have none of him. Loudly he proclaimed the child the son of his mother with no whit of male blood in his veins and he publicly waived all fatherly interest in the monotonous offspring. The infant, however, even in the face of paternal indifference, highly prized the chief, his father. The babe learned to walk. Some

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three days after essaying his first toddling steps he issued forth from the tepee and wandered to the far end of the villages where the warriors sat in solemn conference, there to sort out his father and lean against his knee. Angrily the old chief ordered him to begone. The infant accepted the paternal edict without remonstrance, turned and retraced his steps. Some moments thereafter the head medicine man of the Bannocks uttered a startled grunt of surprise. The babe, on this, his first lone-handed sortie in the open, had unerringly threaded the maze of a hundred wigwams and returned to his own.

"Talagwa," quoth the medicine man. "The Traveling Otter." And the infant chief was named.

The legends of those who keep no written records, but instead pass history from generation to generation by word of mouth, are apt to become colorful as time goes on, each tribal historian putting upon them the seal of his own interpretation. So, too, in tongues of limited vocabulary, one word is apt to mean many things, perhaps pages, according to the eloquent construction put upon it by orators of succeeding generations or the connection in which it is used.

The name of the young chief implied many things. The otter, unlike most water-loving animals, is a great traveler. The tracks of the coyote in the snow reveal a shifting course as their maker has prowled in search of food. The looping, aimless wanderings of lynx and bobcat appear to have been written on the white page of the hills without purpose or destination. But when

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an otter travels overland from one stream to the next he lays his course in the most direct route and holds it without deviation.

Talagwa, the infant's name, denoted variously: that he would ever choose the direct route; that others might follow him and feel all confidence that after many days on the game trails he would lead them out at exactly the predetermined point which was their destination; all this and much more; boiled down, it simply meant that the young chief would be possessed of an unerring sense of direction. It was predicted that he would render great service to his people and would never suffer defeat till such time as age should dim his powers and he should lose his way in the hills.

Legendary history reveals to us that these words were good. Talagwa's prowess was proverbial among all those tribes that traveled the Great Bannock Trail through the northwest hills. It is said that he might blaze a spruce with his tomahawk in a jungle of downtimber and that, years later, he could journey for three days across strange country and strike the opposite side of the same tree without going round it to make sure it was the same trunk previously blazed. He brought great glory to his tribe and not till reaching the century mark did his powers fail. Then indeed did he one day mistake south for north and lead a hunting party into the country of the Grovants, there to be slain by the arrow of a stray hunter of that savage tribe. His followers carried him back to the land of the Bannocks and he was buried in a robe of finest

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otter skins, tanned by the most skillful squaws. Across his breast was laid a mighty pelt; the prime skin of an otter said to be the largest ever taken in the hills. And there was great sorrow at this passing of the chief who had showed such small promise at his birth a century before.

A hundred moons later, after the Bannocks were gone from the hills, another Talagwa, descended in a straight line from that mighty otter whose pelt had graced the dead form of the Bannock chief, was born into the world some five feet under-ground and directly below the ancient tepee site where the infant chieftan had first seen the light of day. And Talagwa, the young otter, gave as little promise of future character as had his namesake of long ago.

His mother had taken over the tunnel of a bank beaver for her temporary home. In the dark interior Talagwa groped helplessly. He felt another sprawling shape and recoiled. Its warmth attracted him and he dragged himself toward it once more and huddled close beside it. Two other tiny creatures joined them and the four baby otters slept in the dark hole. The pangs of hunger roused Talagwa and he drew away from the other small bodies, groping in the velvet black of his damp cavern. There sounded a gurgle of water, a few splashing drops falling back to the surface and the rustle of a heavy body approaching the nest hole through a tunnel. The tiny squeaks of four young otters greeted the returning mother. Her sleek oily fur had shed the water and she was scarcely damp

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when she sprawled on her side to enable her hungry offspring to feed. For an hour after feeding they slept, then roused and gorged once more before the she otter left them with only a sucking gurgle of water to indicate her point of departure.

This life was all that Talagwa knew of the world for a period of two weeks. The straight milk diet was beginning to pall and Talagwa felt the need of other food to supplement that furnished by his mother. He did not know what this craving was but his little muzzle was thrust from side to side and he sniffed eagerly. There was an attractive odor about his nest-mates and frequently he shoved his muzzle deep in the fur of some brother or sister and inhaled the meat smell. It augmented the craving. Then one day his mother returned and a rich flavor drifted to his nostrils. He nosed a fresh-killed fish and the craving became almost an ache. He extended a tongue and drew it across the object and the taste was sweet; still the hunger was unappeased. This angered him and he sunk his tiny teeth in it—and snarled, backing away with his prize and ready to defend it against all comers. For with that first crunch of teeth he had learned of meat!

Talagwa worried the trout and tore morsels of crisp firm flesh from it. Another day and the three other young otters were eating fish.

There came a day when Talagwa grew restless while his den-mates slept and he crawled away from them. The hole narrowed and he rounded the bend of a tunnel

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some six feet beyond. A queer gray light fell across his eyes. For perhaps a minute he peered ahead while his eyes were becoming readjusted to the light. As he started on he found that he could stand upon his short legs and advance in that fashion. Bright light flooded upon his head from above and he paused again, then drew himself up the incline toward the mouth of an opening that the bank beaver had used in going forth to the aspen grove behind.

An abrupt rise of some two feet halted him. He reared on his hind legs but his head failed to clear the hole. Above him were queer feathery branches that waved softly and held his attention. The exit was fringed with green grass and he regarded this growth curiously. He turned and scuttled back down the tunnel at the sound of his mother's return.

Thereafter restlessness assailed him continually and the following day he trailed his mother till she slid smoothly from sight. It seemed that the floor of the tunnel had absorbed her. Talagwa reached forth a paw toward where he had last seen her form in the darkness. The foot sank in something soft and cool. It had a delicious feel and he lunged forward and sank in the water. His head popped above the surface and he swam easily. The pool was long and narrow and he played, swimming the length of it till he was lifted by the swirling heave of a body rising from the deep. He snarled with sudden fear and anger as he fell back to the water. The tempting

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odor of fish reached him and he knew that the monster was but his mother returning with fresh meat.

Later he noted that the water at the far end of the pool had a queer greenish quality. It attracted him as had the light at the other end of the tunnel. Twice he plunged well beneath the surface of the water to peer at this strange green effect, then dove and propelled himself toward it. He slid along the water-filled tunnel and was suddenly surrounded by greenish light. Below it was deeper, more like the floor of the den; above it was brilliant and alluring, so he rose.

His head broke surface and he was appalled by the immensity of his surroundings. He saw land and swam toward it, a dozen times his own length, and nestled close to the bank. There seemed no limit to his surroundings. Above him towered great trees; the strip of water extended far off in either direction. Upstream the current trickled across a riffle and the sparkle of the sun on the water at this point attracted him. A great bird stood in the riffle, almost motionless, occasionally turning its head sidewise to peer down into the water.

Someway Talagwa knew that this movement differed from the movement of the leaves above him or the smooth glide of the current. He crawled out upon a shelf of the bank and fastened his eyes upon this creature. The great blue heron folded his neck and slept. Talagwa ducked warily as a flitting shape swept overhead with a raucous chuckle. The kingfisher pitched to the point of a bleached snag and

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watched the curl of backwater below him. The heron suddenly unkinked his long neck and stretched to his full height, head twisted back to gaze upstream. He rose with an ungainly flapping of wings and swept past Talagwa a dozen feet above the water. Next the kingfisher took flight and the young otter heard the thud of heavy feet. Another queer creature halted on the opposite shore and seemed to strike out with some slender wand.

Stillson, the trapper, sought a mess of trout for his dinner. After the lapse of perhaps a minute he noted the little animal on the far shore.

"Talagwa—Traveling Otter" he^c said. "Right young, he is. The den is somewhere close."

The gruff sounds struck fear to the heart of the young otter and he seemed to shrink in size as he sat very still and even tried not to breathe.

Stillson knew well the ways of the otter. This youngster had not been long from the den and when startled would head directly for it, the trend of his flight betraying whether the den was upstream or down. Talagwa sat motionless and had about decided that the great creature across from him intended no harm. Then it made a curious swift move. There was a tremendous splash as a rock struck the water just before Talagwa, a piercing whistle that jarred his ear-drums, and he took to the stream. As the water closed over him the trapper could not determine whether his course lay up stream or down, for the young otter had made his dive square across the current.

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Stillson watched and made out a dark shape moving swiftly toward him well down beneath the surface of the clear water. Then it disappeared beneath his very feet. Talagwa, even in his excitement, had returned straight to the mouth of his tunnel in a single dive.

An old beaver drag led up the bank and Stillson knew that somewhere beneath the surface would be the entrance to the deserted resort of a bank beaver; that the she otter had made use of it for a den instead of following her usual custom of denning in a beaver house rising above the surface of some pond. He prospected the grassy bottom well back from the shore and found several crumbling exits. Old trails led from these but they were grass-grown and showed long disuse. The old otter had used only the under-water entrance that revealed no sign. But a taint of fish pervaded the air that leaked from the mouth of the holes. In the soft mud bottom of one the man made out the day-old tracks of a baby otter, the ones left by Talagwa on his first curious wanderings.

"They will leave before fur is prime, and travel far," Stillson prophesied. "But from time to time they will return. Then I will pinch their toes."

It was another two days before the rest of Talagwa's family joined him in the open. The four youngsters romped in the water and Talagwa watched his mother perform a wonderful feat. The she otter climbed the bank at the point where the old beaver drag scored a groove in it. The water dripped from

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her fur and sprinkled the surface of hard earth. When she reached the top her fur was dry but the trail was damp and she lay flat on her belly and slid down it; occasionally shoving with her short hind legs. After a dozen trips the trail was soaked and the weight and drag of her body had worn it smooth and sleek as grease. She no longer required the shove of hind feet to propel her but could now slide like an arrow, fore-legs folded back along her sides, and plunge deep beneath the surface of the water.

Twice Talagwa essayed the steep ascent only to find that his infant legs buckled and let him fall back to the stream. On the second day he succeeded and found the breathless slide exhilarating. Thereafter he made endless journeys up the bank to enjoy the reward of the plunge. His short legs grew stronger with this exercise and after two weeks in the open he had nearly attained the size of a full-grown mink. Twice he braved the unknown and swam a hundred yards from the den but always he was assailed by sudden panic over his own temerity and returned in a series of long dives. Then one day he stopped at the top of the bank. Always before his eagerness to strike the slide had been uppermost and the start of his plunge had been almost simultaneous with his gaining the crest. But now he lingered to gaze back into the rank grass behind him. At last he ventured a few feet into new territory, only to whirl and leap for the chute that led to safety. On each succeeding trip he ventured a little farther till eventually he had ex-

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plored the surface for fifty yards around. Bedded deep in the grass were curious circles of stones, the tepee rings of an ancient camp, the stones having been used in lieu of pegs to secure the circular bottoms of the tepees. He stood on the edge of the largest ring of all. This had been a mighty wigwam, some twenty feet across, the abode of a chief, but Talagwa did not know.

He heard a rustle in the grass behind him and turned. A sinister head was thrust from a clump of wild-rose brush at the edge of an aspen clump. Big round eyes peered forth as the cat surveyed the scene before him, the hot scent of young otter pervading the whole atmosphere. The glaring pupils settled on the young otter and instantly the bobcat crouched and sprang. Even as the eyes met his own Talagwa had leaped for safety with the queer doubling jump of his bench-legged tribe. He had no time to make the otter slide but headed instead for a heavy clump of grass in the center of the tepee ring. His second jump carried him to it and he fell headlong into the opening he had visited but once before, and that time below the surface on his first trip. But he did not misgauge the spot an inch, diving straight through the fringe of grass to the very center of the hole just as the claws of the killer grazed his rump.

Thus Talagwa, Traveling Otter, had justified his name in the identical spot where his namesake had earned the title in the long ago. For the grass-grown tepee ring marked the ancient abode of a Bannock chief at the head of a populous village.

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The beaver tunnel was large and as Talagwa scurried down it the cat dipped in after him and followed. The spotted hunter paused for one brief sniff, knowing that a she otter was more than a match for his own prowess when encountered underground. That split second of hesitation gave Talagwa the start and the water closed over him as he dove for the outside just as the cat reached forth a hooked paw to seize him. The frenzied manner of his exit appraised the mother that all was not well within and she started her counter dive to enter almost before Talagwa broke surface. The cat had beat a hasty retreat and the teeth of the enraged otter clamped on his rump as his forepaws hooked the outer edge of the hole through which he had entered ten seconds past. He tore himself from this grip and fled to the shelter of the aspens.

The young otters were as full of play as a litter of puppies, a distinct departure from the ways of their relatives. For the otter belongs to the weasels, and the play of most other weasel folk, excepting the young of the skunk, consists of mock battles and bloodshed—and all too frequently is not confined to imitation strife, but becomes very real. But Talagwa and his kinsfolk wrestled and romped in the water from sheer love of play. The four of them, in attempting to keep one another from the slide, would often come down it in a tumbling mass and struggle for supremacy six feet under water. A huge dog otter appeared on the scene and lingered with the family for an hour. He was a stranger to Talagwa, even though the grizzled old

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fellow was his father. Thereafter the dog otter visited them at frequent intervals. This too was a departure from true weasel custom, at variance with the habit of the tribe.

The boar mink is never permitted to near the den of his mate, nor is the male of the weasel. Even the mother skunk will fly at the throat of a buck of her species, even though he be her own mate, if perchance he attempts to enter the place where her young are cached. For the keynote of the weasel tribe is stark ferocity and the males are all too prone to dine off the young of their own kind. The dog-otter does not share the responsibilities of rearing his offspring, and he takes long journeys by himself, but he does return for an occasional romp with his mate, and his young never suffer harm at his hands; and there is much evidence to indicate that the dog otter rejoins his family group in early fall when the young commence their journeying to see the world under the guidance of the mother. Perhaps this difference lies in the fact that to most of the weasel tribe every living thing that moves is food, a fair target for claw and fang, while the diet of the otter consists almost exclusively of fish. Occasionally he varies this by rising to seize a duck or goose asleep on the surface of the water, but there is no reliable evidence that any four-footed creatures are included in his bill of fare, and it is doubtful if he even slays the muskrat who inhabits his own element and would be easy prey to the otter if the big weasel was so inclined.

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Talagwa's appetite increased and the old otter was forced to fish almost continuously to supply sufficient quantity of food for her ravenous family. There came a time when Talagwa felt always a slight pang of hunger, as if he never had quite enough fish to supply his needs. This sensation was uppermost when he dove into a deep hole under the bank. There, in the clear water, he suddenly saw meat just before him. The goggle eyes of the big trout glared at him and the fins were stiffly outstretched. A ray of sunshine touched the edges of the translucent fins and the tail with light. Talagwa moved forward to partake of this banquet so unexpectedly set before him. His meal disappeared with a lightning dart. He looked anxiously about him and at last made out the goggle eyes peering from a dim cavern under the roots of a mighty spruce. When his prey darted off once more Talagwa, enraged at this unheard of thing, darted in pursuit. The fish he had known in the past had all reposed quietly on a sandbar or on the floor of the den to be eaten at leisure. Here was one that refused to be eaten.

The young otter took to exploring the pools. Fish were easy to sight but very difficult to secure, but he persisted and at last surprised a whitefish. It endeavored to dart past him but his jaws closed on it with a swift side snap and he withdrew to the edge of a bar and feasted. As he finished he observed the approach of his mother, followed by the rest of the family. She moved across the bar, a fish in her jaws,

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and the three young otters leaped eagerly after her and sought to seize the food.

Back against the bank was a land-locked pool left in a depression of the bar when the flood water of a few days past had receded, and into this basin she deposited the fish. For an instant the squawfish seemed stunned, then revived at being returned to his own element, and he darted away as a young otter reached for him. The three hungry youngsters took to the water in search of their food. Talagwa hopped across the bar to join them but before he reached the scene the little lake was yellow from the sediment stirred up by their combined exertion. The she-otter left them exploring its murky depths and soon returned with a whitefish. From then on she made them work for their meals. Thus does the cat bring home to her kits a crippled mouse, the mother skunk a disabled grasshopper, all to teach the young that live, active meat is food, instructing them in the game of life. And thus, in some fashion, are the young of the wild things educated in the school of the wild as surely as the young of the human kind are sent to learn in the schools of men.

Talagwa enjoyed the sport of fishing. There was excitement in the swift pursuit through the cold depths of the stream, a thrill of joy in the first crunch of jaws on the elusive prey. Soon he would take no food from his mother unless very hungry. As he explored the bottom of the stream for a hundred yards each

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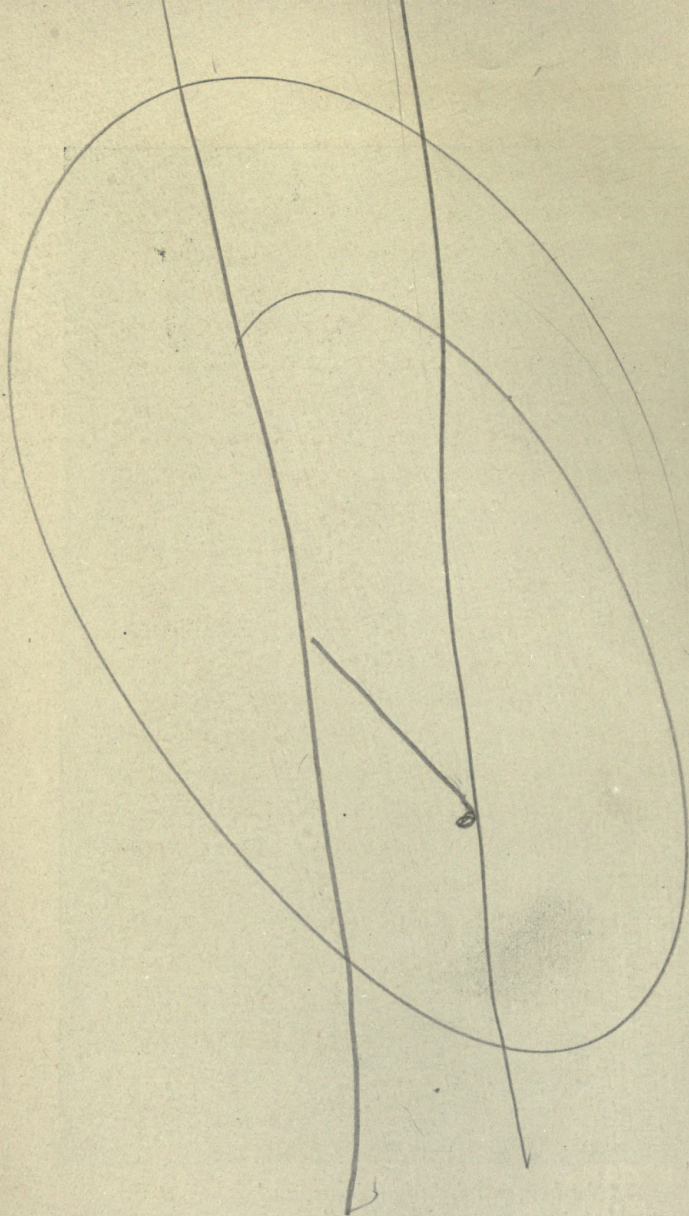
way he passed and repassed the shadowy forms of his brothers and sisters, themselves on the submarine hunt for meat.

When they had become expert in this most necessary art the she-otter marshaled them one night and led the way downstream. Talagwa glanced back from the first bend, the old home behind him, off at last to see the world and rove the hills. Talagwa, Traveling Otter, had come into his heritage as a free lance of the lakes and streams.

For miles they followed the creek till it broke into a vast sheet of water. There were great beaver colonies round the margins of the lake, with houses rising from pools dammed up where streams joined the lake. Most of these were untenanted for Stillson had trapped this territory the season past. The she-otter chose another stream, the Klootsin river, flowing out of the lake. At every feasible point they found otter slides made by other families, now gone on travels of their own, and at each of these ready-made playgrounds they tarried for a romp. After moving downstream for some thirty miles they turned off up a tributary creek that broke in from the right and followed it to the very head, crossed over a low divide traveling overland for ten miles to the tip prong of another creek that led them down to the Rickaree. Their course lay upstream along this little river to another lake, then up a creek, another stretch of overland travel and Talagwa found himself on the head of Cache Creek, his home stream. A day's journey



*"She moved across the bar, a fish in her jaws, and
the young otters leaped eagerly after her."*



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down this brought him to the old den and here the otter family lingered for two days.

The nights were crisp and cold, the long grass was stiff and white with frost of mornings, and paper ice formed on the surface of still pools. An early snow fell and melted. Another storm shed a two-foot layer of white across the hills. The after-storm cold of the high country clamped down in its wake and a half-inch of ice formed on the beaver ponds. The streams were still open, flowing swift and dark between shores of fluffy white. The fur was beginning to prime.

Stillson had taken to prowling the hills to lay out his traplines for the winter. His territory was large, extending from the Klootsin to the Rickaree, roughly bounded by Talagwa's rout of travel. He had three outlying cabins besides the one that served as base camp and in these he stored food and bedding for the winter's work. He picked trap-sets for his fox lines on the bald ridges of the divides, laid out marten lines along heavily timbered slopes, selected those ponds where fresh cuttings revealed the presence of a few surviving beaver left over from his inroads of a season past; and as he followed the streams he noted every otter slide along their shores. His traps were strung out and cached, ready to be set when the flesh side of a pelt showed flint white.

Talagwa came down Cache Creek after still another snow. At times he swam in the swifter stretches that were free of ice; at the bends he left the stream and cut across. Just above the old den was a riffle and

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above this a long smooth stretch that was frozen over and he traveled its length with the unique style of locomotion peculiar to his tribe. Talagwa was very long and his legs were very short with a vast stretch of body between hind and fore quarters. He moved with short leaps, all feet closely bunched for the next hop, and after every third jump he threw himself forward in a slide. Where the ice was smooth under the thin skiff of new snow he frequently covered fifteen feet at a slide. Where the snow had blown off and left glare ice it was no unusual thing for him to cover thirty feet. But where the going was rough, the ice choppy or the snow soaked by water seeping through from below, his slides were blank failures, but he essayed them nevertheless.

He coasted over the last smooth stretch and struck the open water of the riffle, following the center of the stream till opposite the den, then veered to the bank. The rest of the family were just taking the riffle. Talagwa hesitated. Three times in as many days different members of his family had plunged down otter slides and received a terrible fright. Twice he had seen dead otters swaying deep beneath the surface of the water. He did not understand the exact nature of the trouble but knew that otter playgrounds had now become points of grave menace for his kind. But this was his own slide, one he had covered a hundred times; surely there was no danger here. He chose a point in the bank and left the water to climb to the top of the chute. The snow had melted

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and left the bare earth sleek and frozen on the slide. Dark heads dotted the water as his family reached the scene just as he launched his body down the chute. There was a shattering blow on his breast-bone as he entered the water and a patch of fur gave way as his weight and impetus wrenched him free of the trap jaws. The otter family made off downstream and once more Stillson had missed his catch.

The trapper was not surprised at the percentage of misses. He found at least six otter traps sprung to every one that held a victim; for the otter is the most difficult to trap of all the animals of the hills. Nature favors him in this for he has not the cunning of the fox or the coyote. Rather it is his habits and way of life which operate to protect him. When an otter shoots his slide his short forelegs are folded back and it is his breast that first slides across the trap-pan and springs the deadly contraption concealed well below the surface of the water. All along his route between these common play-grounds of his tribe the traveler is almost immune. He fishes for sport as well as for food and scorns dead meat. The trapper has yet to appear who can concoct a bait or scent to which the otter will rise.

Some three weeks after Talagwa had first learned of traps his family traveled down the ice toward a sharp bend in the Klootsin. A bluff flanked the south side of the river and here was the longest otter slide that marked their route. Here too was the site of Stillson's most productive set. Three times since

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the fur had primed Talagwa had passed this spot, and three times he had viewed the dead form of some member of his clan, the body wavering in the current well down toward the bottom of the stream. Talagwa did not know the reason for the high mortality rate for this particular spot—but Stillson did.

Round most otter playgrounds the animals could rise from deep water and climb a gently sloping bank at almost any point, gain the crest of it and proceed to the top of the chute. Here there was an abrupt drop of four feet to the water and above that sheer wall a steep ascent of some thirty feet. There was but one feasible break that led out of the water and at that point a beaten trail led up the slope. An otter, in leaving the water, loses the advantage which is his upon entering it, for in crawling out upon the bank he is sure to thrust a foot upon the trap-pan instead of striking it first with his breast as when coasting down his chute. Also it is easy to determine where an otter will re-enter the water—for every traveler will stop for a slide—but it is most difficult to predict the point where he will elect to leave it as he starts up the bank. This one set had netted Stillson five pelts in three weeks, more than the catch of a score of slide sets combined. The first animal to take the trail after each re-setting of the trap was a certain victim.

One of Talagwa's sisters preceded him down the stream. He crowded down upon her to be the first to take the trail to the slide but she beat him by a foot.

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The next instant she recoiled with a desperate wrench as a four-pound trap, bedded eight inches beneath the surface, clamped shut on her foot. For perhaps a minute she struggled and thrust her head down to grind her teeth against the thing that gripped her. Then she made her dive for the safety she had always found in deep water. Talagwa saw her slide smoothly from sight. He dove after her but her flight seemed to stop short and she turned over and rolled helplessly in the wash of the current.

Stillson had wired a ten-pound weight to the trap. A smooth, heavy wire led down to a rock anchor in the deep water off shore. The ring of the trap chain slid down over this cable with a trapped otter's dive but the animal could not rise again. Talagwa's sister was anchored there to drown.

Within a week Talagwa learned of another menace, this too the work of man. His father had joined them and the dog-otter led his family down the Rickaree. A stream had once meandered across a broad flat to join the river but the work of the furred engineers had long since converted the flat into a beaver swamp. There was little drop to the flat and a dam backed the water up for two hundred yards. At points the banks were overflowed and these seeps broke into new channels, only to be dammed in turn and their waters stored.

Stillson knelt by a pond as he stripped the pelt from a beaver. Five dark specks left the Rickaree and moved across the white ice of the lower pond as

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Talagwa's family swung aside to prospect the swamp. The trapper carried a gun on the rounds of his trap-line. Many times he was thus enabled to add a pelt to his catch by shooting a fox on the ridges or a coyote in the sage flats and there were occasions every winter when he chanced across a family of otters. He moved to a point of vantage on the one slight mound that rose from the bottoms and dropped to his knees in the brush. The series of ponds split up-country beyond the mound and came down on both sides of where he crouched, only to close in and merge and disappear in a patch of scrub timber below. He looked out across the tops of the trees and saw the five specks headed his way. The ponds on the north side of the mound were frozen solid, the ice white with old snow. The long pond that flanked it on the south was exposed to the sweep of the wind and the heat of the sun. The lower end of it, some fifty yards below his stand, was open. Thin rubber ice, formed the preceding night, covered the expanse nearest him, while at the upper end the ice was heavy and coated white with early morning frost.

Talagwa crawled over the dam at the lower end and swam leisurely up the pond, plunged beneath the surface and eyed the bottoms for stray fish. When he rose his head punctured the paper ice. Four other heads rose near him. A vicious thud sounded from behind him as a rifle ball split the skull of the brother nearest him, then the jar of the report. Every head disappeared from sight. Talagwa made for the

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fancied safety of the far end of the pond. From his height Stillson could see the dark streaks that were otters speeding just under the paper ice. Talagwa heard the hollow chug of a rifle ball in the water. His sister, swimming a few feet from him, doubled up and floundered, her back drilled through by the heavy slug that had found its mark through three inches of water.

Once under the heavier ice the three remaining otters were temporarily safe. But Stillson's rifle was trained on the stream of open water that flowed down the dam at the upper end of the pond. Beaver and rats, with the aid of the overflow, had kept open a small passage. It was a long shot, some two hundred yards. Stillson touched the trigger as a dark shape started up the dam. Talagwa's father doubled back as the ball struck an inch above his head. They turned once more down the pond. Talagwa's lungs ached by the time he cleared the ice and he rose for air. Something seared the right side of his head and struck his fore-leg with a sickening shock. He dipped down once more and when next he rose the hollow chug of a ball and an upflung spout of water an inch from his ear sent him under in a panic. The three survivors reached the dam at the lower end of the pond but as the old dog-otter essayed to slide over it he fell back on the far side with a broken back. The she-otter made it safely, but Talagwa, his father killed before his very nose, hesitated and turned back. Twice Stillson shot at his head as he broke surface for air and when his prey

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had disappeared under the heavy ice he waited patiently. His wait proved to be in vain. The ice had buckled at one point, forming a tiny air-space between ice and water. Talagwa found it and here he lingered.

Not until nightfall did he venture forth. The world seemed vast and empty, fraught with a thousand dangers—and he was alone. Unerringly he turned toward the old home. Someway he knew that if there should ever be a meeting place it must naturally be in the vicinity of the den. The pain along his head had numbed but the torn foreleg treated him to hot stabs of agony. He held grimly to his course, but as he moved over the ice and snow his jumps were shorter and the leg buckled under him. Toward morning he reached Cache Creek and found another otter trail before him. The she-otter had chosen a different line of flight but after finding herself alone she too had turned and headed straight for the old home.

Talagwa found her prowling round the empty den. He had reached the end of his strength and when he curled up in the underground nest he slept for a day and a night. The torn muscles of his jaw had stiffened and there were three shattered fragments of bone in the wound. The crippled foreleg had swelled to three times its normal size and he could not trust an ounce of his weight upon it without feeling a tortured wrench throughout his whole right side; and he was not built for traveling on three legs. A coyote or cat could have held the wounded member aloft till it healed but in Talagwa's case it was impossible.

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A heavy storm raged across the hills for three days without a break, and the intense cold that followed it completed the work of freezing over lakes and streams. For a week Talagwa could not fish but ate a portion of the prey his mother brought to the den. Then he could do some little fishing for himself and occasionally he sat on the snow-covered ice of Cache Creek for an airing. By the end of the second week he found strength to travel by short stages and left the spot with his mother.

An hour after their departure Stillson swung down Cache Creek on his webs and halted to view the tell-tale sign in the snow.

"So," he said. "It was the family of Talagwa, Traveling Otter, which I cleaned up in the Klootsin Swamp. Only two are left, the one I nicked and the old she. I'll have their pelts before spring."

Talagwa found a different world, a land of ice and snow without open water. For miles they traveled on the ice. Then his mother led him to an air-hole and they dipped beneath the frozen blanket. The next two miles was exclusively under-ice travel. There were air-bubbles in spots where the water had receded since the taking of the ice, others where the popping of frost had buckled the ice. The hills were white and silent, the season of famine for the wild things and of harvest for the fur-seekers. The bears had long since denned for the long sleep. Squirrels and chipmunks were curled up in their shelters. There was never a beaver drag up the banks for these wise

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providers had their food caches on the bottom of the ponds. The white page of the hills showed only the trails of the killers—fox and coyote, martin, weasel and cat—as they prowled on the never-ending hunt for meat. They traveled the ice of the streams, gaunt and savage from the pinch of famine. And while they scoured the frozen surface Talagwa hunted beneath it and found fish in plenty, his hunting ground the icy water of the streams instead of the frozen hills. There was never a period of famine for the otter tribe.

During this first winter he learned every open hole throughout his range. There were spots where warm springs seeped from the banks and kept open tiny apertures in the ice; others where some queer back-lash or twist of current in swift water left a rent in the frozen surface. He learned too that these points were fraught with danger, for the trapper knew that these open doors through the ice, leading down to the dark watery hunting ground of the otters, were frequented by all members of that traveling tribe. Now the slides were deserted, snowed under and buried deep from sight, so Stillson set traps wherever these otter doors opened into shallow water. But while Talagwa had not the cunning of fox or coyote neither was he afflicted with the sheer stupidity that renders the marten or the cat an easy prey to the most clumsy trap-set. He had learned of traps, and now he found one on the bottom beneath every air-hole, waiting with gaping jaws for the unwary hunter. He learned to avoid these by sliding into the water with forelegs folded

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back and swimming a few strokes before touching bottom. This became fixed habit as the winter progressed and Talagwa never dropped carelessly through an opening, even if the snow about it failed to show the web-tracks of some trapper.

The young otter saw the spring, the summer and another winter without feeling the clutch of a steel trap and it was during the course of this second winter that a new meaning of life came to him. For long he had traveled alone but now a vague restlessness assailed him and he journeyed more extensively than ever, covering territory that was new to him. He rose one day and peered from an air-hole in the ice. Another otter had left it and the day-old trail was plain in the snow. Talagwa followed it two miles to where the tracks ended in a dark hole with swift flowing water beneath. He dipped in and held on downstream, rising to investigate every opening in the ice. At last he came to the exit where the one he followed had left the water and again the trail led away across the glaring white; again it disappeared in the watery depths under the ice; out again, and at last branched off up a tributary creek. The tracks were left by a young she-otter whose range barely overlapped the edge of his own. He held on and crossed a divide, down to a river that was strange to him, and up that stream. On the second day he rose in an opening kept free of ice by a warm spring. The she-otter had just left it and she snarled at him as he appeared within a few feet of her. For a week he trailed her persistent-

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ly, following along behind her over the snow, sometimes within a few feet, again separated by the space of a hundred yards, plunging under the ice when she disappeared, leaving the stream once more at her point of departure. She grew accustomed to this persistent shadow and accepted his presence. At first he signified only companionship, a fellow wanderer over frozen wastes. Later he became the devoted mate. They covered her range as well as his own, thus increasing the range of both.

A chinook fanned the high country with a warm breath of spring. The winds rotted and honey-combed the ice. Talagwa's mate seemed less inclined to travel long distances and spent much time investigating the tunnels of bank-beavers or the beaver-houses that showed above the ice of the ponds. At last she chose a huge house out in a shallow lake. It was deserted, the cache on the pond floor still untouched, for Stillson had caught out the colony to the last one before the food was consumed. An under-water door led up through the solid structure of logs and mud to a spacious chamber under the roof. She lingered near this refuge and Talagwa twice visited his mate in her new home but she seemed to have lost interest in him. Then, too, the wanderlust claimed him and he grew restless. At last he departed alone, trusting that she would follow.

The first few days of his wayfaring were trying and he covered little distance, doubling back on his

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course to see if she followed, but eventually he gave it up and proceeded alone.

Something called him back to the point of separation, as in the long ago he had felt the urge to revisit the den where he was born. His mate was there but she had little time for him. Three baby otters crawled and squeaked in the beaver house and the she-otter keenly felt the responsibility of motherhood.

At frequent intervals throughout the summer the dog-otter returned to visit his family. A slide had been fashioned down the side of the beaver-house and here his offspring romped and played.

It was while upon one of these visits that Stillson saw him next. The trapper stood in the edge of the timber, his elbows resting on a down-log as he steadied his glasses and trained them on the otter den. A dog-otter climbed the house and sat on the crest of it. His head turned from time to time as he sampled the wind and peered about him. Stillson studied him for long. The right side of the otter's face was white. Stillson's mind slipped back to the young otter he had nicked with a rifle ball in the Klootsin Swamp, then to the tell-tale blood-sign in the snow round the den on Cache Creek where the victim had gone to recuperate. He recalled that first meeting when the baby otter had sat motionless on the far bank of the creek.

"It is Talagwa, Traveling Otter," he said, recalling the whimsical title he had that day bestowed on him. "We meet again. Talagwa has survived and bids

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well to justify the legend of the Bannocks. The hair has grown in white along his head where I creased him. When it comes winter I will pinch his toes." And it so transpired that this prediction came to pass.

The she-otter led her family off to see the world with the first crisp days of fall. Talagwa joined them and during the months he watched this second family group break up as had the first. When the hills were blanketed deep with white and the lakes and streams were crusted over with solid ice Talagwa once more found himself a lone traveler, every member of his family having fallen prey to Stillson's snares.

After three seasons of close trapping the fur was growing scarce in Stillson's territory and he could now afford to spend considerable time on a single set if it promised to make a catch. He chose a stretch on Cache Creek for the site of the first of a series of cunning trap-sets. The stream struck a flat meadow which checked its rush and for a mile the water held a smooth easy flow. This was good fishing ground and Talagwa always traveled this stretch under the ice. Stillson repaired to a point previously selected, where the stream narrowed slightly and the mud bottom lay some eighteen inches below the underedge of the ice. With his ax he cut an oblong hole one foot by three, then unlashed a bundle of half a hundred slender willow stakes. These he pushed down into the soft mud of the bottom, forming a pen the size of the hole, open at the upstream end. At the lower extremity the stakes were set but an inch apart and a cross-section

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formed a pen twelve inches square. Into this smaller compartment he dropped three large squawfish he had netted through a similar hole in the ice. A passage two feet long led to this queer live-box and on the floor of it he anchored two heavy traps. Within an hour after he left the spot the hole was frozen over and the upper end of the stakes were wedged securely in solid ice.

Talagwa had seen much of the evils of man and had grown very wary but he had never encountered danger under the ice. He dipped one day down an air-hole at the upper end of the Cache Creek meadows and hunted downstream, pausing to breath at the air-bubbles scattered along the under-side of the ice. A movement caught his eye and he darted toward it. Here was meat. Three large squawfish floated lazily amongst some brush on the stream bed. They crowded to the far side of the enclosure as he reached it. There was live meat within a foot of him but the sturdy stakes were set in the mud below and the ice above. He rounded the corner but still found no way of entering between the close-set stakes. As he followed upstream along the three-foot enclosure he drew away from the prey. But the upstream end was open and he darted down the narrow passage. Once more he drew within a few inches of the fish but he could not reach them. The cross-section which formed an end of the live-box that contained the bait was a bar to his further progress.

Stillson had planned well. An otter would swim

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around these penned fish and take the opening at the upstream end of the narrow pen as a natural lane to his prey. But an otter swims with his short fore-legs folded and would slide in without springing the traps. Once inside he would be forced to back out of the passage against the current and in executing this move he would drop his forefeet to the bottom. There were few characteristics of the furred folk that Stillson had overlooked.

Talagwa could not reach his prey; neither could he turn round in the narrow lane between the stakes. He dropped his forefeet to the bottom to push himself backwards against the current. There was a grate of loosened springs and his foot was clamped by crushing jaws of steel. He cleared the mouth of the pen with a savage wrench. The way of least resistance lay downstream and as he struggled desperately to free his foot of the trap and its heavy anchor he jerked the stone from its seat in the mud and dragged it ten feet below the fish-pen. His breast ached from sustained exertion and inability to refill his lungs with air. Two more minutes and Talagwa would have been floating lifeless in the current. He left off his fight with the trap and lifted his nose to the under-edge of the ice to seek for air.

The flow of Cache Creek had receded under the intense cold, then had risen again with the added volume of water furnished by the warmth of a recent chinook. The ice had first sagged and cracked from lack of support, then lifted and buckled as the water

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rose again. A new recession of the flow had left an air space along this cleavage and here, ten feet below the site of his capture Talagwa refilled his lungs with blessed air. For hours he struggled and thrust his head down to bite the trap which held him. Lack of circulation and the chill of cold water numbed the wounded member and rendered it insensible to pain.

The foot had been lowered near the edge of the trap and the jaws had gripped but two toes. These toes, however, were short and tremendously thick. Talagwa's strength was unequal to the task of tearing them from the trap. His struggles had broken the bones and with the cessation of pain he commenced the work of amputation. Man is not the only surgeon. The beaver and the musk-rat, fox, coyote and mink, even the lowly skunk, all will amputate a foot gripped in the steel jaws of a trap. The cat-beasts seem not to have the hardihood to sink teeth in their own flesh; the bobcat, lynx and cougar, in spite of ferocity toward other animals, prefer to wait tamely for the coming of their captor and meet death at his hands rather than to inflict pain upon themselves by fighting the trap. Not so, however, with Talagwa; down beneath the ice, under the water more than half the time, handicapped by the lack of space and air, he worked incessantly at the imprisoned toes and at last he moved off down the stream, one forefoot raw and bleeding from the recent amputation. The winter snows of the open reveal the trails of many fur bearers with "peg legs."

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The following morning Stillson covered his trap-line on Cache Creek. He crossed the trail of a crippled otter and studied the sign.

"Footed him!" he decided. "I've pegged Talagwa. From now on he will be one hard otter to trap."

Talagwa, who would touch no bait of dead fish, would ever after be suspicious even of live fish that swam in brush enclosures under the ice. Already he knew the dangers of slides and the traps that waited for him there. Again Stillson recalled the fanciful legend of the ancient Bannock chief.

"He will live long years," the trapper said. "My traps will not take him. Not until his powers fail and he loses his way in the hills will Talagwa, Traveling Otter, come to the end of his trail."

It was after the lapse of another dozen years that Stillson hunted elk in the vast timbered flat between the confluence of the Klootsin and the Rickaree. A heavy storm had settled down and forced him to lay out all night. The sun rose bright and strong, only to be blotted out by a cold fog, one of the dense milk-white fogs that come only to the high country with extreme cold and in which seasoned hill men hesitate to travel. The flat was some twenty miles across, covered with a dense jungle of down-timber without stream lines to guide the footsteps of the wanderer. The trunks of the trees disappeared in the white shroud, appearing only as stumps, and his view was restricted to a space of twenty feet. The country was choppy, its surface marked by a thousand small irregularities;

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low mounds and shallow sags of surface that collected the melting snows of spring and formed land-locked bogs and murky pools. All looked the same. He traveled the rough flat without a compass, endeavoring to hold the straight course, but in the cold fog of the winter hills all signs fail. The temperature dropped to twenty below and the fog still held. He rested that night before a fire but the morning found him very weak as he headed on. An hour after the start he crossed a trail in the snow.

The tracks were left by a huge dog-otter with a maimed forefoot. Stillson took up the trail and knew that if his strength held it would lead him to running water. He had known of otters crossing ten miles of country between streams but here Talagwa had elected to cross the twenty miles of timbered, waterless flat rather than to move down one stream to the confluence, then up the other fork. Stillson reflected that a hundred small ranches marked the flats and the shores of the two rivers near the forks, a wilderness when first Talagwa traveled it, and the old dog-otter had elected to take this barren cut-off rather than run the gauntlet of that portion of his one-time route now infested with the homes of his enemies.

Even here in the snow Talagwa essayed his slide after every few jumps. The trail was very fresh and it led away through the fog in a line as straight and true as an engineer might run with his transit. An hour later Stillson heard a splash just before him. Twenty yards beyond he came to an air-hole in the ice near the

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bank of the Klootsin. Talagwa had crossed twenty miles of rough country and struck the river exactly at the hole. A five-pound trout, partially eaten, reposed on the ice, left there by Talagwa as the sounds of Stillson's approach startled him; and the trapper, as he tore at the raw fish with his teeth, had reason to give thanks that Traveling Otter still retained his powers and could travel the straight course between streams.

Other men came to share Stillson's trapping grounds. Settlers filed their homestead rights on the flats and their water rights on the streams. The fur-sign was scarce in the hills and for many a year Stillson put out no traps in the fall. Smoke rose from the chimneys of a thousand cabins in the valley which had known only his camp-fires when first he came. The cows of the settlers grazed on meadows that had once been the floors of beaver-ponds, the rank grass having covered the rich earth since the breaking of the dams had released the water.

In the fall the young men among the settlers threw out their traps. The coyote was still plentiful and there were muskrats in small numbers along the streams. An occasional cat or martin left his tracks along the timbered slope. The beaver was but a rumor of the past; but there was still left in the hills a valuable prize for the trapper. For ten years a lone dog-otter had left his trail on the snow-covered ice of the streams for all to read. He was a giant of his kind and many a trap was set for him. Always this otter came back to Cache Creek at least a half dozen times each

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winter and from October to April that little stream was studded with traps but no man looked upon his set and found the Cache Creek otter anchored there. In a country of little fur even the tracks of a mink on the banks of a stream called forth excited comment and the fame of the dog-otter of Cache Creek spread. Yet no man saw him. Year after year he left his trail in the snow along the Klootsin and the Rickaree and of summers his slides were sometimes found on the banks of the streams; but he fashioned these as he felt the need to romp as he had done in the long ago and after using them once he never returned.

There came a winter of big snows. The fall storms were early and left heavy white layers across the hills. Stillson had hired out to a young rancher to feed stock for the winter. The range had been combed to gather the cows at the home ranch but a dozen head were missing, probably pocketed in rough country and snowed in. The young rancher and the first settler in the valley headed for the vast timbered flat between the two streams to ride for the missing stock; and just ahead of them an old dog-otter attempted to cross from one stream to the next.

Talagwa was very tired and the snow was deep. At times he squatted motionless for long periods. It came to him that it was far to water by the straight course. He turned again in eccentric loops and at last headed up country, directly away from a watercourse. He traveled haltingly and with frequent detours.

The two men headed their horses into the tangle in

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search of the tracks of the missing cows. The tracks they found were those of an otter, ten miles from a water hole.

"The Cache Creek otter," the young man said. "Once the cows are all gathered I'll have another try for him. This year I will stretch his pelt."

The young man saw nothing unusual about the tracks, but Stillson, who had looked upon them a thousand times, leaned from his saddle to inspect them. The trail wavered far to either side of the straight course. There were melted spots where the otter had tarried long in the snow. Then the trail turned off up-country away from a water course. Stillson's mind traveled ahead over the trail and he pictured the end of it; a dark spot in the snow; meat eating birds of the hills hopped round it; the dead furnishing food for the living that life might go on through death. The first settler on the Klootsin felt a distinct sense of loss. The young man's voice penetrated his abstraction.

"This year I will pinch his toes," he said. Then he turned and gazed, wondering if the old man beside him had reached his dotage, for the words he spoke were strange words.

"Traps will not take him; no man will stretch his pelt. Not until his powers wane and he loses the straight course will he reach the end of his trail." He pointed to the wavering tracks while the young man stared. "Look you!" he said. "For you'll never see them again. Talagwa, Traveling Otter, has lost his way in the hills."

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It was broad daylight when Tukuar closed his eyes, the slanting rays illuminating the points of the Sunlight Peaks, but when he opened them it was night, the only visible lights appearing as brilliant sparks in the distance. It was the third time he had witnessed this strange thing, for Tukuar was three days old. Some of the points of light gleamed from the sky above the lofty slope on which he lay, while others, larger and with a reddish tinge, seemed scattered through the dark bulk of the hills themselves. Far below him was the largest of all. Tukuar was too young and inexperienced to classify the night lights. He knew not the stars above from the Washaki night fires below; could not distinguish between the big village fires in the valleys and the signal flares in the peaks.

But even at that great distance he could detect shadowy movement round the big glow in the bottoms, for Tukuar sprang from that tribe which the animal gods had endowed with the all-seeing eyes; and the eyes were what stamped his face with a hint of the Orient, even though his forebears for a thousand gen-

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erations had ranged these same Sunlight Peaks. The ball of each eye was yellow; the pupil, a curious flattened oval, was dark—almost black. It was this capsule-shaped pupil set in its yellow field that enhanced the impression that Tukuar should have first viewed the world from some point in the far Himalayas instead of having entered it among the Sunlight Hills.

The shadowy movement round the big light far below him gained his attention. It flared brilliantly and a horde of antlike figures circled about the edge of it, while the monotonous throb of tom-toms reached his ears. And as Tukuar watched the fire the wise men of the Washakis settled his fate without his knowledge or consent.

For the Washakis had come upon adversity. In the beginning the beliefs and customs of all the tribes of Shoshonean stock had been identical, but as creeds have differed at all times among all peoples, so now the various tribal branches, even though holding tenaciously to the religion of the parent stock in the main, had come to put a different interpretation on many minor points—and upon one of these points the life of Tukuar hinged.

The bighorn sheep was the tribal animal of all Shoshonean peoples, his meat the most highly prized delicacy of all. The Tukuarikas—Sheep-eaters—in the Wind River Hills, the Shoshones in the valley of the Stinking Water, the Washakis on Clark's Fork, all had hunted the bighorn. It was known to them all that when the first pair of bighorn sheep had multiplied

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until their descendants numbered a full thousand that ranged the Western peaks, the animal gods had sent a black ram to celebrate the event. On that same date the descendants of Manitou, the first Shoshone, had been able to count a thousand souls in their lodges, and a mighty chieftain, Tukuar, the Black Ram, had that day been born among them. Thereafter one black ram was born for every thousand sheep. It was said that the tribal gods had but to sweep an eye across the peaks and count the black rams in order to know how many thousand sheep were numbered among the bighorn bands, and so determine how their Shoshone children fared for meat.

The Tukuarikas had split off from the main band to uphold their belief that others besides chiefs were privileged to slay black rams. The Washakis had seceded and established a village of those who believed that the killing of a black ram under any circumstances was a direct affront to the spirit of the chieftain, Tukuar, who sat beside Manitou. All tribes had prospered and there was meat in plenty. But at last the lean days had come. The Shoshone lodges were gone from the banks of the Stinking Water, the tepees of the Tukuarikas in the Wind River Hills were few and the last village of Washakis held nightly council and made medicine to the tribal gods. The guns of the white man had harried the bison from the plains; the elk were gone from the foothills and the bighorns were growing fewer in the peaks.

But the medicine men of the Washakis had reached a

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solution at last. They had killed no black rams for more than a century and as a consequence there was now one black for every hundred sheep. Tukuar, the one to whom Manitou had given it to preside over the destinies of the bighorn kind, could now see many black rams in the Sunlight Peaks—and he believed that his Washaki people were well supplied, that a thousand others lived for every black. The black rams must all be killed and the god, Tukuar, would observe this shortage and hasten to repopulate the hills with sheep. As night follows day and day follows night, it would even as naturally come to pass that the Washaki lodges would once more number countless thousands, for in the beginning it was ordained that their numbers should accord with the numbers of the big-horn sheep. As simple as that! The council pledged the death of all black rams, and in the joy of their deliverance the end of their troubles now in sight, the Washaki bucks broke into the swing of the sheep dance, the chiefs adorned with the curling horns of bighorn rams. The roll of the tom-toms rose triumphantly and far up in the peaks Tukuar, the little black ram, drowsed contentedly with the rhythmic boom of them throbbing in his ears.

With the coming of day he heard a more portentous booming, scattered and irregular, the thunderous reports of black-powder muskets roaring through the hills. The hunt was on.

Tukuar's mother was a very old ewe, well versed in the ways of the Washakis. A musket ball was embedded in one hip and there were two arrowheads, one of

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flint and one of obsidian, buried beneath her skin. These sounds did not greatly alarm her, but she was constantly alert. Her feeding place was a boulder-studded meadow that pitched abruptly down to the rim of mighty cliffs that defied approach from below. The meadow rose above them for two hundred yards to the crest of a knife-blade ridge that dropped away in long open slopes on the opposite side. Tukuvar and his mother fed with a band of a dozen ewes and four other lambs. Above them an old ewe had stationed herself on the ridge crest, sweeping all approaches from that side with eyes that detected even the movement of a fox a mile away. This sentinel was frequently relieved, not through any definite system of standing guard in turn, but through the fact that as soon as the one on the ridge left it to feed on the slope one of the other old ewes immediately grew nervous over this lack of protection in the rear and took up her own stand there.

Shortly after noon Tukuvar's mother grew restless and cast frequent glances toward the ridge. The sentinel had left her post and no other had replaced her. The old ewe could stand this suspense no longer and she left Tukuvar bedded in a boulder field, the rocks varying widely as to size and shape, while she stood guard. She had sound reasons for leaving her offspring in this spot.

A hundred soaring specks floated above the expanse of the Sunlight Peaks and Tukuvar gave them little thought, but the old ewes knew their meaning all too

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well. Tukuar lay motionless, his head resting flat upon the ground, and occasionally glanced aloft, moving nothing but his eyes when one of the flying specks sailed low over his retreat. He caught a movement among the rocks some twenty yards from his position and centered his gaze on it. For a space of minutes he could see no motion, then a light colored rock shifted position a few inches—and Tukuar knew it was no rock but another lamb cached there by its mother.

Other eyes had detected motion. A thousand feet above a great bird sailed off till it reached the desired distance to give the proper angle for a dive, never once removing its eyes from the one rock out of all the boulder field that had moved.

Tukuar heard a low humming sound and with the first note of it every ewe rushed madly toward the spot where her own lamb was cached. Tukuar heard the pounding hoofs of his mother as she leaped down the meadow. Another came up toward the boulder field with desperate bounds—the mother of the lamb that had moved. The hum increased to a sinister hiss as of escaping steam. A great shape bored down out of the blue, the wings curved slightly back, and at the instant Tukuar's mother reached him the bird struck the lamb twenty yards below. The ill-fated one's mother was too late. She reared and struck viciously at the big eagle as he flapped away, but he was beyond her reach, the lamb gripped in his talons. Thereafter Tukuar dreaded the sailing specks above.

For five days the sounds of the hunt rolled across the

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hills and at night the signal fires flashed the news of the tremendous success of the hunt to all outlying camps. As they sought for black rams the Washakis shot down all other sheep that came their way. Those they could not use were dragged to open spots and left. For was it not the proper thing to provide feasts for the emissaries of Tukuar, the god of bighorn sheep?

Alone of all tribes, the secret theirs for none to share, the Washakis knew that Tukuar's emissaries rode upon the wings of eagles. It had long been noted that the mighty birds soared low over the bighorn bands, then climbed aloft and disappeared, tiny specks above the fleecy clouds, off to report to their guiding spirit. It was the Washaki boast that there were more golden eagles in the Sunlight country than in any other spot of like size between the rising and setting sun, and for perhaps a century no Washaki had slain an eagle, the feathers that adorned their chiefs being obtained through trading with other tribes who prized the eagle only as a trophy to be killed for feathers of wings and tail. The scores of birds floating above the peaks noted the progress of the hunt, ready to swoop to the feast and pick the scraps.

The Washakis having one bad law passed another to remedy it; and this made matters worse, for the one thing needed to restore the bighorn bands to their former numbers was to wage ruthless war on eagles, the relentless pirates that destroyed three out of every four lambs born in the Sunlight Peaks.

Tukuar had rapidly lost his initial awkwardness and

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by the fifth day he could bounce down the slope without missing a step. A few more days and he could leap to the top of a boulder, stand on its sharply sloping surface or skip from rock to rock without a slip. He was two weeks old before the ever-watchful sentinel on the ridge gave the alarm. Tukuar was engaged in a playful butting match with another tiny ram of his own age, their heads pressed firmly together while each braced his feet and exerted every effort to drive the other back. The two mothers grazed within a few feet of them, never straying far from their offspring when the latter were moving about, knowing that this would invite swift attack from the winged murderers above,

One after another the old ewes raised their heads and every one in the band fastened her gaze on the lone sentry on the point. The guarding ewe moved excitedly and stopped, repeated this move four times before she whirled and bounded down the slope. Even before she reached them the others were in full flight for the edge of the cliff. Tukuar's mother pitched down through a break in the rim and leaped along a narrow ledge that angled down across the face of it. She tacked back and forth, running as smoothly on the rough projections of the cliff face as if on level ground, Tukuar following close behind.

When the Washaki hunters topped the ridge there were no sheep on the boulder-littered meadow above the rims.

The band of ewes threaded the sheep trails along the wall and came out upon a narrow ridge that formed a

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connecting saddle, dipping between two bulky hills. As they fled along the crest of this Tukuar's parent halted in her tracks. An old whitened root lay in the center of the saddle in the midst of a few large rocks. Her sharp eyes had detected a slight movement between the forks of the root. It might have been the flirt of a chipmunk's tail, but—it was not the first time she had viewed the hair tuft of a Washaki buck protruding above one of these strange blinds that covered the sheep trails on every connecting saddle top; the musket ball and the two arrow heads imbedded in her flesh testified to this. The rest of the band stood huddled close behind her. There was no further movement, but she whirled and plunged down the steep declivity, the others running with her. A terrific report crashed from the old root and a ewe that ran near Tukuar leaped far out from the slope and nearly smashed the black lamb in her fall. She rolled limply down the steep sidehill, bucking and sagging like a half-filled bag. A savage whoop of surprise announced the exultation of the red hunter over this chance shot.

The battle-scarred old ewe headed straight for a far point where she had found refuge in the past when a general hunt was on. She bore away from the Clark's Fork side of the divide, crossed it and held straight on through the ragged maze of pinnacles toward the rims above the Stinking Water. The hills teemed with hunting Washakis and she sighted many prowling bands. Twice during the day she avoided piles of stones and weathered roots that loomed beside some

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sheep trail she was following. By nightfall she had attained her goal and after ascending a seemingly endless cliff face she led the band out on a high flat top a thousand feet above timber line.

Tukuar found himself on a plateau extending a mile in length by half that distance across its widest extremity. It stood isolated and alone, the sheer walls of it falling abruptly away from every side. The streams that headed close under it to the south rushed off to the Stinking Water. Crag Creek swung in a twisting bend north of it and looped back, its tremendous yawning cañon cutting the flat top off from the parent range behind. Tukuar could sweep enormous vistas of country in every direction. Far off across the Stinking Water the Wapiti Mountains loomed against the sky, their lower slopes carpeted thick with spruce and lodgepole. The valley spread out before him for twenty miles to where the walls pinched sharply in upon it, blocking it in by towering cliffs except for the narrow gap two thousand feet in depth through which the Stinking Water roared on its way to the low country. Below him sounded the hollow pounding of the Crag Creek Falls.

He could see the glowing sparks by night and the smoke columns by day ascending from fires that never died on the points that the white men later called the Lookout and Signal Rock.

Here Tukuar spent the summer. The Washakis hunted ceaselessly in the hills, but no hunter attempted

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the perilous ascent to the lone flat top that the curl of the cañon cut off from the rest of the world. He heard the reports of their muskets, but these came softened by distance. Sometimes at night he could see the fires of their hunting camps.

He romped with the three remaining lambs of the band and as they grew stronger he led them in explorations along the face of the cliffs.

When he was three months old he rounded the shoulder of the wall on a narrow ledge and came full upon a strange creature resting upon the extreme edge of a jutting shelf. This monster had tremendous horns that curled out and back, then forward. He turned his eyes upon the four lambs, favored them with a casual inspection and resumed his nap.

Tukuar passed him frequently after that, always resting peacefully on some point that afforded a clear view for miles, and the lambs learned that he meant no harm to them.

Tukuar was now too heavy for an eagle to carry in its claws and he no longer particularly feared them. But one day as he traveled along a narrow trail he learned that these birds were resourceful. The trail pinched out, but there were outcropping rocks projecting a foot or so beyond the sheer face of the wall at intervals of a few feet. Tukuar worked across these, leaping from one to the next. Some were so small that he must bunch all four feet close together as he landed, remaining in that position until launching

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forth to the next. The three lambs followed in single file, the next one in the rear lighting on each rock as Tukuar left it.

He heard again that hiss of mighty wings planing through the air. The eagle tipped dizzily on one side and struck viciously inward at the lamb behind him, giving a terrible wrench that dislodged its precarious foothold on the sloping point of rock. Then the point was empty. Tukuar looked over and saw a sprawling shape turning grotesquely through the air, another form diving gracefully after it, following it down. A sickening thud floated up to him, and the grinding of dislodged slabs in the rock slide piled at the foot of the cliff. He made frantic haste to reach the flats above.

The nights had grown rapidly colder. Two early snows, soft and clinging, had fallen only to melt and disappear. In the mornings there were tongues of ice along the rocks where water seeped from the cracks. The bull elk started bugling, the first of the animals of the hills to mate. Two weeks later Tukuar could look down through the rifts in the trees below him and see an occasional movement of white on the timbered slopes—the white flags of mule deer milling restlessly from one spot to the next. Then the beasts with the curling horns climbed to the summit of their home range and joined the ewes.

Heavy snows fell and drifted. The days were too cold and short to allow their melting. From his lofty point Tukuar could see the solid white of the peaks, broken only by the brown tops of the ridges. The dead

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white of the snow gleamed through the heavy green of the spruce. Elk and deer moved down the country, holding to the timbered valleys, but the sheep still held to the peaks. Then came a gray day, an icy wind drifting slowly from the east. Milk-white fog banks floated in the pockets of the hills.

The old ram led the way, ewes and lambs followed close behind. They worked down the cliffs, crossed Crag Creek and ascended the other side, following down the ridges of the main divide. Tukuar's eyes detected moving dots on other ridges, others beyond those. The bighorn tribe was on the move, but instead of following the valleys, as did the elk and deer, every band of sheep traveled the backbone of some ridge. Once started, they passed the antlered tribes that had streamed below them a month before. For the elk no longer wintered in the open foothills as in the past, but made what shift they could to winter through in the lower valleys of the hills. Tukuar had been born in time to be a part of the last general movement of his kind to the winter range in the bad-land breaks.

The old ram moved far down the range, chose an outcropping spur and followed it, resting on its rims late in the afternoon of the second day. Tukuar could see many animals of a kind strange to him feeding in the flats below. When night came the band descended to the flats and headed swiftly out across them.

The young ram heard many new sounds as he followed close at his mother's heels. A deep rumbling bellow sounded from close at hand and he pressed close

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to the old ewe's flank, but the old sheep paid no heed to this note. White men had first started grazing their cows here three years before and most of the band had heard the bellow of range bulls before now. The bawl of a cow was the next note to startle him. The low country was frequently made hideous by an outburst of jeering yelps that rose from all sides. Tukuar had heard the squall of foxes in his native peaks, but these coyote voices were new to him. The flat wastes were little to his liking. There were no rough ledges and mighty cliffs upon which to hide when danger threatened and he felt a sense of helplessness, awed by his own insignificance, his feelings much the same as those a plains-bred calf would experience at finding himself among the wild pinnacles of Tukuar's home range.

Then a new note drove the fear into his heart, a savage wail that rolled across the flats. Every sheep stopped in its tracks and they stood huddled together without a move until a far-off answer floated back, dreading to go on after hearing the message that two of the last buffalo grays in the foothills were on the hunt. After perhaps a minute the sturdy old ram led on and toward morning he led them into a broken choppy country—curious flat benches encircled by cut-bank washes and draws, a veritable network of coulees, miniature cañons with straight sides. From the midst of the bad lands a great pile of barren many-colored hills rose in a tumbled mass above the surrounding country, the Rainbow Peaks, seeming but an isolated

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ruin borne into the low country by some gigantic convulsion of Nature and left there with no connecting link of hills to bind it to the parent range.

All through the winter Tukuvar heard the hunt calls of the two buffalo grays, but the big killers did not molest the sheep. They killed among the stock on the open range and at this time of year few cows penetrated the breaks of the bad lands. For the same reason few riders came that way. Those that did come wrought havoc among the sheep, for they came to hunt, bringing strings of pack horses to be loaded out with meat. These men had guns that shot many times and once within range of a bunch of sheep the toll was heavy. Once in midwinter Tukuvar's mother raised her head and took one look at a bad-land rim a hundred yards away. A stunted sage on the edge of it had suddenly darkened and showed no light through it. She was off to a flying start, Tukuvar leaping after her. The rapid reports of a magazine gun roared behind them. A sheep on Tukuvar's left made two wild lunges and pitched down with her head doubled under her. An old ewe just ahead of him collapsed in a limp heap, a .45-90 ball in the base of her brain, and Tukuvar cleared her body at a single bound. He heard the thud of lead behind him and a third ewe dropped out of the bunch. The old ram had drawn away to winter by himself. Tukuvar saw him appear on a rim off to one side and he had scarcely showed himself on the sky line before he lurched drunkenly and pitched over the brink. Then the rest were safe

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in the bottom of a bad-land crack and they ran for miles. A dozen times during the winter Tukuar heard the heavy cannonading that told of many casualties in other bands of sheep.

Winter softened into spring and the grass greened at the roots of the sage. Tukuar's mother led the remnants of the band back toward the Sunlight Peaks, crossing the flats at night. From well up the slope of the hills Tukuar heard the aching wail of a single buffalo gray, the last note of its kind that would ever reach his ears.

They fed slowly up country, crossing over the heavy drifts from one open ridge to the next, lingering where feed was good and keeping just below the solid snow line. It was a month before they finally grazed out onto the meadow from which Tukuar had first glimpsed the world. He could see other bands of sheep in the open points, for all bighorns had not wintered in the low country. The wind whipped the snow from the flat plateaus and exposed ridges, uncovering sufficient feed to winter many of them through. It was only the surplus that migrated to the bad lands.

The snow still claimed the peaks and there were treacherous snow combs that curled out and overlapped the rims, but there were broad patches of crisp green grass between the drifts.

Tukuar's horns had first formed irritating points beneath the skin, then pushed through and showed above the hair of his scalp and lengthened, but not rapidly, for the horn growth of rams is very slow.

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The Washakis did not resume the general hunt with the coming of spring. Many bands of them filed through the hills, but these were burial parties carrying their dead to their last resting place on the very lip of the rims that overlooked the streams, interring them in solid-rock inclosures, their most-treasured belongings by their sides. There seemed to be a great sickness in the village. Day after day these files came to the rims and from his heights above Tukuar wondered what it was all about.

There came a time in early fall when Tukuar saw the signal fires flash messages through half the night. From far out across the low country, where the chiefs had gone to gather in council with the whites, the message was relayed from point to point that the remnants of the tribe of Washaki must break camp and move to some spot of the White Father's choosing. Two days later there was great commotion in the village. Tepees were struck and all belongings lashed on the pole litters trailing behind the ponies. Then the cavalcade filed down the valley, a long line of blue-clad horsemen riding with it. Thereafter Tukuar heard no more the rhythmic boom of tom-toms from the valleys and the smoke pillars were gone from the Lookout and Signal Rock.

By fall Tukuar's horns had attained a length of seven inches, rising from his skull with a slight curve outward and to the rear. Very few sheep returned to the bad lands for the winter—only one or two small bands of old sheep that could not break the habits of

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a lifetime. The majority remained on the peaks, as there was feed in plenty for their depleted numbers. They scattered in small bands on exposed ridges and high plateaus open to the sweep of the wind.

Tukuar wintered with the ewes, remaining with them the next summer as well, but during his third winter he drew a little apart from them and fed with a few old rams that held clannishly off by themselves, and with the coming of spring he deserted the ewes entirely. He chose his summer home on the face of a cliff that flanked a mile-long bench, a cool north exposure where the sun failed to reach him even at mid-day. A dozen rams ranged this mighty wall, feeding on the grass that grew on the shelves and ledges of the cliff and sprouted in tufts from the cracks of the rocks. The drifts packed in the crevices were slow-melting and the water that seeped from their lower edges furnished abundant moisture for the grass that carpeted out-cropping shoulders between the series of crumbling rims.

Tukuar first learned of the tawny killer of the hills during his fourth winter. The big cats seldom invaded the peaks, preferring the easier killing of the lower valleys, the elk and deer furnishing the main bulk of their feed.

Tukuar lay with six other rams under the edge of a low bench that broke the drive of the wind. A bunch of ewes and lambs fed in the flat a hundred yards away. Tukuar saw an old ewe fling up her head, gaze in his direction for a single second and break into mad flight,

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followed by the rest of the band. Every ram sprang to his feet, knowing there was danger near. The wind blew straight over them, and a ram's nose is not so keen as that of many other beasts. A puff of breeze curled downward and eddied under the ledge. This flurry carried a fearsome scent and the rams broke cover at top speed. A dreadful yellow cat launched forth from the edge of the bench twenty feet above and crashed down on the ram in the rear, his frightful claws reaching far down his victim's sides and clamping there while the long fangs crunched into the neck at the base of the skull.

Every sheep on the mile-long ridge was in wild flight for the rims. Tukuar plunged over a sag in the snow comb and landed on a shelf six feet below, raced along it and leaped across a break, working his way far down the cliff. The whole face of the wall was alive with frightened sheep and for two days not a single head peered over the edge. The ledges were packed with frozen drifts that sloped perilously down to the dizzy brinks, but not one sheep made a fatal slip. The big-horn can travel where no animal but the goat can attempt to follow. Tukuar's hind feet were provided with sharp-edged hoofs almost identical with the hoofs of a deer. Each front foot was formed by two bulging capsule-shaped pads lying side by side and capable of being spread wide apart, the cleft between them running well up into the foot. His sharp hind feet cut into the frozen crust; the non-skid forefeet clung to the most slippery surface.

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It was hunger that drove him forth at last, for the feed that had covered the wider edges in the summer months was now covered deep with snow. Only a few exposed tufts sprouted from the cracks and these had been cropped short. He climbed to a break in the comb and peered over the edge. Two old rams and a dozen ewes were there before him, feeding close to the rims and frequently raising their heads to inspect a dark spot that lay farther out on the ridge. Two eagles perched on this and tore at it, for the mountain lion had only been crossing over the divide from the Clark's Fork side to the Shoshone, the white man's name for the Stinking Water, and he had torn but a few mouthfuls from his victim before going on his way.

Other sheep appeared here and there over the rims and fed out into the open. Just at dusk two foxes came to feed on the meat left behind by the tawny cat. For two days the eagles picked at it by day and the squall of foxes rose from the spot at night. Then only the bones and horns remained.

Tukuar looked down from his lofty perch and witnessed many things. White trappers had come into the hills the year the Washakis left. They threw out their trap lines along the streams for beaver, for lynx and marten on the timbered slopes and on the bald ridges for the foxes that traveled the high divides. Prospectors had come in the wake of the trappers and Tukuar peered down upon them as they sampled the ledges. Sometimes they started drifts where the float was promising. These men killed for meat and bait,

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discriminating not at all between ewes and rams. The white man's cows were already grazing up the Clark's Fork bottoms. For two years Tukuvar had heard dull rumbling blasts that jarred the foundations of the hills. These came from a mine that lay almost at timber line on the Clark's Fork slope of the divide. All these men must be fed. The elk and deer in the bottoms suffered heavy losses, and the sheep that held to the lower peaks.

The bighorn is a lover of his home range and if unmolested does not travel extensively. It had been Tukuvar's lot to be born in a particularly rough and uninviting strip of country, and with meat in plenty the hunters failed to penetrate the massive pile where the black ram made his home.

In Tukuvar's sixth year his horns measured fourteen inches round the base. They rose from his skull, a continuous graceful curl to the rear, down and outward until the sharp points came back a little below and almost even with his eyes. During the past two seasons he had occasionally met a few scattered ewes and squired them through the peaks until some ram with heavy horns appeared and assumed control. But this year Tukuvar felt belligerent, frequently lowering his head and shaking his horns for no reason at all. Lordly bucks and huge bull elk had summered in the rough pockets near timber line only a few hundred feet below his own summer retreat. With the first cold days, these antlered lords began to prepare for the mating moon. The velvet growth that had shielded the horns from harm now hung in frowzy shreds and the

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owners horned the close growing boughs of timber-line spruce to scour it off and polish their shining points. Then they dropped down to the valleys to meet their does and cows.

Tukuar climbed to the heights above in search of new worlds to conquer. He stopped often to shake his head. Once over the rims he struck a sharp trot and gained the crest of a slight rise before him. As he topped it he observed an old ram with a band of a dozen ewes, and Tukuar felt a great rage sweep through him. He bore furiously down upon the other ram. The ancient warrior shook his head menacingly, and as Tukuar neared him he rushed to meet him. They drove together with every ounce of weight behind their horns, and the heavy curls crashed with an impact that stopped both rams short and almost crumpled Tukuar's neck from the shock. The old ram renewed the onslaught so swiftly that he battered Tukuar steadily backward. His charges followed in close succession—merciless, crushing drives. Tukuar could not stand against his heavier horns and greater weight and in less than half an hour he quit the field. For two days there was a dull ache in his neck and a curious roaring in his ears. Then he felt better and set forth again.

He spied a ram of his own age holding five ewes. This time the warriors were evenly matched. When exhausted from charging they pressed the curls of their horns together and contented themselves with shoving one another about until sufficiently rested to renew

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their desperate rushes. In the end Tukuar held two of the ewes for his own. Whenever a strange ram appeared his two enemies bore down on him together with such show of ferocity that he quit that particular mountain top without striking a blow. At intervals of a week or more the two rams renewed their own quarrel, but the fights did not last more than a fraction of time of the first engagement. At last a change came over them. Tukuar left his ewes and wandered across to inspect his enemy. The other ram came out to meet him, but there was no resulting fight. It seemed to be in the mind of each that this silly quarrelling over so commonplace a thing as a band of ewes should cease. The hatchet was buried between them and they grazed off by themselves.

The ewes drifted together and thus they wintered.

The white hunters had noted the fact that the points on the horns of young rams were slender and sharp, while those of older rams were blunt and splintered. Some contended that these points were broken in the yearly combats. Others insisted that in dropping from one ledge to the next the rams landed on their powerful horns, which could withstand the shock of the drop much better than their leg joints and that this shattered the slender tips. Tukuar's points were still sharp and it had not occurred to him that this feature would ever be otherwise. When he fought he took his opponent's weight on the heavy curl of his horns, not the points; when he dropped to a shelf below he sometimes leaned over and landed on the padded forefeet, easing his hind

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parts to the ground, and to the long-range observer it might appear that his head was the first part of him to strike. But Tukuar had no intentions of performing any such headlong dives.

In his eighth summer he was conscious of an obstruction to his sight. It was his habit to rest his head flat on the edge of the rims, the curl of his horns brushing the ground. From this position he could gaze off in all directions without moving his head. But of late when he turned his oval eyes to the side it seemed that something blurred his vision. Often he stretched his neck ahead, but the blur moved with him, and when he turned his head to look for it it was nowhere to be seen. He was forced to turn his head to face the object he wished to inspect and could no longer peek from the corners of his eyes. This grew more pronounced, and at last he realized that the horn points had passed his eyes.

Tukuar swung his head at a projecting point of rock with a twisting upward movement that shattered the point of one horn. He battered industriously till both tips were splintered back sufficiently to cease annoying him when he wished to glance to the side without turning his head. Thereafter he worked them down against the rocks as fast as the ever-growing curl forced the points ahead of his eyes.

There was now a swarm of men working in the mines. The elk had quit the Clark's Fork side, only a few scattered droves remaining. The sheep on the lower ridges had been killed or driven back into the

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peaks and the hunters frequently penetrated the higher fastnesses of Tukuar's home range. After two years of this the black ram moved away from his favorite country and traveled toward the Shoshone side of the peaks, taking up his stand in the ragged Sawteeth at the head of Crag Creek. Across from him loomed the towering bulk of the flat top where he had found refuge while the Washaki hunt was on, the curve of the yawning cañon cutting it off from the rest of the world.

For another five years no man looked upon the black ram. Tukuar frequently strayed along the tremendous backbone of the range and swept the low country with his powerful eyes. Strange things had come to pass in the lowlands.

There were dark spots from which smoke pillars curled lazily, as once they had ascended from the Washaki signal peaks. The flats were streaked with fine white lines and often Tukuar saw the trailing puffs of dust as white-topped wagons passed over these roads. The valley of the Stinking Water, now the Shoshone bottoms of the white men, was dotted with ranch houses and corrals.

One day he descended to the first rims that flanked the valley near its lower extremity, and as he gazed down into the jumbled mass of foothills at the foot of the wall there were other eyes as powerful as his own that gazed back at him. A band of antelope stood on the point of a knoll.

These speedsters of the open plains had been crowded

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back out of their native range to make their last stand in the broken country at the foot of the hills. The pronghorn buck that led the band could see Tukuar as clearly as the black ram could see him. One point they had in common—telescopic eyes, sight their most highly developed and most dependable sense; but here the likeness ceased. The pronghorn buck was lithe and slender, built for speed; the black ram was sturdy and short coupled, fashioned for the strenuous work of hill climbing and bucking the drifts.

Tukuar could perform wonderful feats of agility on the face of a cliff where the antelope could not even find a foothold. The pronghorn could skim like a streak across long stretches where the ram would appear but an awkward galloper by comparison; each one perfect in his natural environment, helpless when transplanted, yet here they stood and exchanged looks across a bare thousand feet.

There were other prairie dwellers in the hills and Tukuar heard the nightly serenades of the coyotes. These cunning ones had fled from the low country before the poison baits of the wolfers and were accustoming themselves to new conditions in the hills. Tukuar may have marveled at the swift transitions that had come to pass during his own short span of life.

On the day of his birth there had been ten sheep in the hills for every one that ranged them now. But the bighorn kind had been holding its own for two seasons past. Tukuar did not know the two factors that had stopped the slaughter of sheep. He had long since

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lost his fear of eagles and so perhaps did not notice that they were rapidly disappearing from the hills. The big pirates spiraled down to feed upon every trap bait set or poison put out by the trappers and these men gazed wrathfully upon every eagle that had spoiled a trap set for better game by hopping upon it themselves. Each eagle so snared meant a longer life for many bighorn lambs, and their way of feeding on bait put out for foxes inspired the trappers to shoot down every one of the birds that came in range. A much larger percentage of lambs survived than formerly.

There was another factor that helped save Tukuar's race from extinction. The first forest ranger had been stationed in the Sunlight Peaks and this man championed the cause of the bighorn sheep. There were existing laws to regulate the killing of game, but of such recent birth that the settlers in the far pockets of the hills scarcely knew of their existence. They had always killed their meat as they needed it regardless of place or season, and this they continued to do.

Brennan knew that he could not alter the convictions of a whole community, and as other wise men have done before and since he conceded some points to gain his end. The elk herds could no longer winter in the foothills and they crowded into the valleys when the snow fell heavy and there hundreds of them starved. In the face of this the settlers respected no law that forbade their killing the surplus which would otherwise have been winterkilled and gone to waste. It was soon

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rumored that Brennan could not see a quarter of elk meat hanging on a settler's cabin at any time of year, but that hell broke loose in the neighborhood of any man that shot rams out of season or ewes at any time of year. On this basis he fought it through and won.

Tukuar heard the rifle shots in the valleys, but there was no shooting in the high country above timber line except in the fall months of every year.

Brennan spent much of his time in the sheep range, watching the rare animals that were his favorites of all game. The hunters brought out the heads of many fine rams each season and the killing of these ancient ones had no influence on the sheep herds as a whole, for there was ever a surplus of rams. The ranger cherished a longing to take a head that was larger than any that had yet come out of the hills. He had seen two-thirds of all the rams that ranged in the Sunlight Peaks, many of them old and with massive horns, but for six years he had withheld his fire, always searching for the one ram that would prove the largest of his kind.

Brennan had heard the tale of the big Washaki hunt and the massacre of the strange black rams that had once roamed there. It was said that one black ram had been seen once but was never killed. Apparently it had vanished from the face of the world, for the whole Washaki nation had scoured the length and breadth of the Sunlight Peaks without ever sighting him again. Three miners had reported having seen a great black

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ram in the hills, but that had been long ago and no man had seen him since, and year after year the ranger wondered if the legend was based on fact and if it were possible that one black ram still roamed the peaks.

Tukuar, the cause of this speculation, led a quiet life on the walls of the ragged Sawteeth. The older rams were shy and wary and the trophy hunters found it increasingly hard to find good heads. Some of them occasionally hunted the Sawteeth for ancient rams, but Tukuar always received warning of their presence. The ewes and lambs on the ridge took alarm at their approach and whenever a bunch of frightened ewes suddenly forsook the high meadows and sought safety under the rims Tukuar was apprised that danger lurked above. He worked round the shoulders of the rocks to safety. This was his only source of warning, for the man scent was not carried down the walls in sufficient strength to reach his indifferent nose unless the wind was exactly right; and his ears were of little help.

Sound meant little to him. All his long life he had listened to falling stones loosened from the cliff face by the alternate freezing and thawing of the water that seeped through the crevices in the rock, torn away by the force of the wind or dislodged by the feet of other sheep. These rocks crashed against the shoulders of the cliffs in their descent and smashed through the trees below. Some key point frequently gave way in a rock slide with a resultant grinding of rocks as the whole slide moved. In the winter great sections of the overhanging snow combs gave way along with a portion of

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the crumbling rims themselves and precipitated hundreds of tons upon the steep slope at the foot of the cliffs, gathering momentum and roaring on in an avalanche that swept a lane through the trees and piled débris a hundred feet deep across the bottoms. Some men believed that these constant sounds had caused old rams to be careless of noise, attributing it to some similar source. Others affirmed that the eardrums were deadened from the battering fights and that old rams could no longer hear at all.

It may be that Tukuar did not hear the first reports that thundered in the narrow gorge. In any case he did not trouble to rise from his bed until a ram appeared, running wildly along a shelf below him. Then he jumped to his feet and turned round in jerky bounds as if bewildered and undecided which course to take. His eyes centered on the two heads on the rims across and he ran, leaping along ledges and bouncing across breaks to the next point beyond. As he started a queer shape whirled down from above, turning over in the air, and a dead ram struck the edge of the shelf on which he ran and bounced off into space. Another crashed limply to the ledge and he leaped over it.

Then the two men across first saw the fabled black ram with the massive horns. The steady roll of two magazine guns banked up in the cañon and was tossed from wall to wall; spurts of rock splinters played round Tukuar as the heavy balls searched for him; then he was round the bend and out of range.

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The tale was spread and once more the big hunt for the black ram was on.

Brennan decided to come in from across the range, and in so doing he was even wiser than he thought, for Tukuar had quit the Sawteeth and moved back to the range of his youth. While the hunters scoured the vicinity where the men had last seen him the black ram was squiring a band of ewes ten miles to the north, separated from those who sought his life by a maze of yawning gorges and towering points.

Brennan topped a mighty ridge two hours after sunrise and swung along the crest of a spur that led away toward the Sawteeth. He stopped and listened to a distant sound. Time after time it reached him, the dull booming impact of heavy horns. He sat down and rested his elbows on his knees as he trained his glasses in the direction of the sound. He gazed long, then lowered them.

"Tukuar," he said. "The last descendant of the god of bighorn sheep. One to every thousand—the count stands correct, for there are not over a thousand left in the whole of the Sunlight Peaks."

It was but fitting that the man who had stood for the salvation of the bighorn tribe should take the best trophy of their kind, and Brennan started for the ridge where Tukuar battled with another ram.

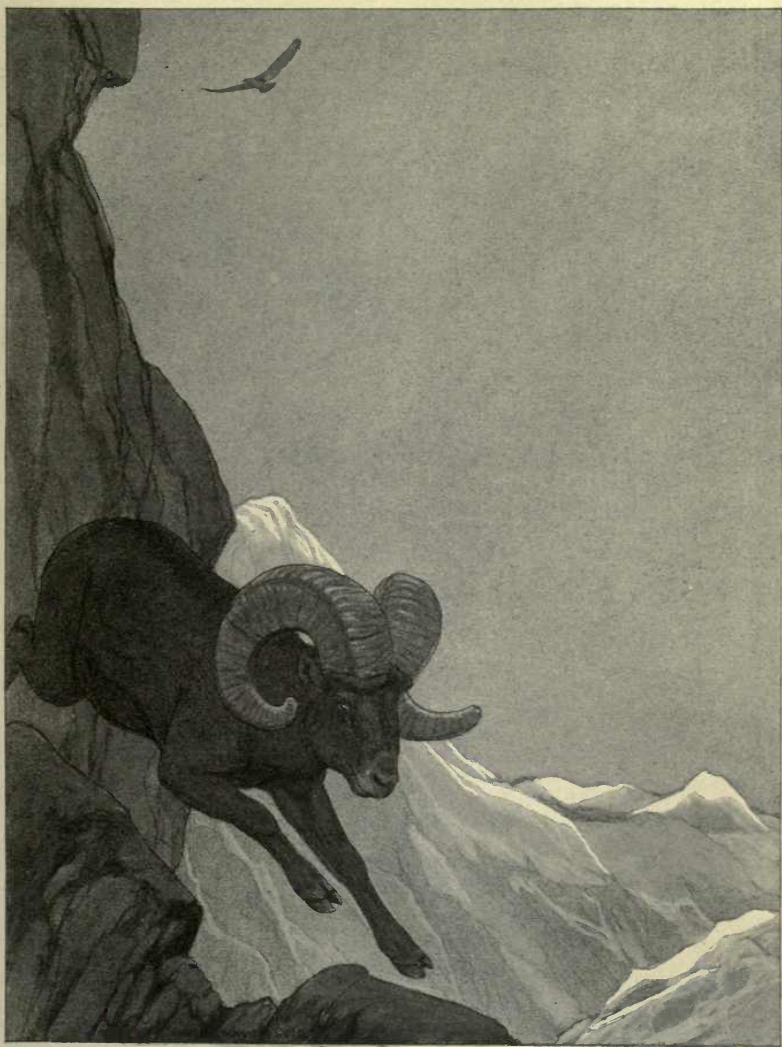
It was late in the afternoon when Brennan reached his goal. He cautiously circled a band of ewes, keeping well out of their sight. The tracks of a great ram

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led down over a rim and he crept to the edge. It was not a cliff, but a precipitous slope, and two hundred yards below him the black ram had turned back and was climbing toward the ridge. The oval eyes detected the man's form the instant he looked over the edge, and Brennan was treated to a sight that it is given to but few men to witness.

The sidehill was so steep that a man could have put forth one arm even with his shoulder and touched the slope as he walked round it. Even an elk or deer would have bunched his muscles, braced his feet and put on the brakes at every jump when running down it, holding himself in check. Brennan beheld the black ram fleeing down the slope in mighty bounds and instead of holding his speed in check he seemed only to touch and skim on once more in another leap of such length that the legs of an elk or deer would have crumpled under the weight of his body as he landed. Tukuvar disappeared, his hind feet throwing dirt uphill behind him at every jump as his muscles drove him on. And Brennan had not fired. He reasoned it would have been too difficult a mark and would only have served further to frighten the ram whose horns should one day be his. In this way he explained his failure to shoot when within range of the most highly prized animal in the hills.

Once more Tukuvar disappeared as he had done in the time of Washakis. No man cut his trail for another year. Brennan hunted long for him and in the summer he sought to locate his retreat so that he



"Brennan beheld the black ram fleeing down the slope in mighty bounds."

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might take his scalp in the fall, but with all his knowledge of sheep he could find no trace of the great black ram.

The ranger often gazed longingly at the towering flat top that stood alone, cut off by the rent at the head of Crag Creek, the point upon which it was said no man had ever set his foot.

With the coming of fall Brennan made his camp in the head of the cañon and made the attempt to scale this lofty pile. For a week he prospected round its base, and after frequent ascents which proved to be false leads he found a break through which he could reach the top. After four hours of strenuous and dangerous climbing he came out on the flats that had never before been marked by either moccasin or boot print.

A few wise old ewes fed at the far end of it and he kept under cover as he crossed to the cliffs that fell away to the north. As he moved along the rims he examined every point that reached out from the cliffs. There were long stretches where the walls were sheer and there was nothing to see but the feathery tops of the spruce a thousand feet below. He reached a spot where it seemed that a huge chunk had been nicked from the lip of the rims. The sides of this notch were covered with a carpet of grass and pitched abruptly down, giving the basin a whirlpool effect. And on a point that jutted from its lower extremity the black ram lay asleep. A long hunt had ended.

The ranger looked through his sights. Twice he

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shifted his position to make sure. For a space of minutes he looked down from the edge and retraced his steps, for after all it is more the joy of the hunt than the kill at the end of it. He had noted well the mighty horns and estimated their measure as more than seventeen inches round the base.

"Maybe they'll keep on growing," he said. "I'll come back from time to time and see."

Brennan knew the ways of rams. Tukuar would range this isolated peak and if unmolested would not leave it during the few years he had yet to live. He could find the horns when Tukuar was winterkilled and mount them on the scalp of some other ram. Once more the ranger excused his failure to shoot.

Tukuar slept on, unconscious of the fact that death had stalked close to him and passed him by. Most of his time was spent in sleep and in pondering over the changes during his quarter century of life.

A year had passed before the ranger made another trip to see if the horns had grown, and perhaps a week before he came the black ram closed his eyes in the light of the noonday sun. It must be that he dreamed, for when he opened them again it was night and the Washaki signal fires were once more flashing in the peaks.

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HE man and the girl rode along the lip of the mesa. North of them the foothills rolled away to the main bulk of the range. The man pointed to the town spread out on the flat below them. "There's a city that is practically undiscovered and entirely unmapped," he said, "but it shelters more races than Denver."

"It must be a humdrum existence," the girl observed. "What do the inhabitants find to break the monotony?"

"A thousand things a day," he stated. "There's a greater diversity of experience to be found in that little baked town on the flats than in any city you ever visited in your life. If they only published a Dog Town daily it would chronicle more tales of tragedy, comedy, crime and love than the biggest metropolitan sheet. That fat old man on the roof of his observatory, the big house near this edge of town, is Weekin, probably the patriarch of the village. To-morrow, if you'd really like to know, we'll come back a little before daylight and spy on the town with glasses from a blind up here somewhere and let you see for yourself the number of thrills in Dog Town in a single day."

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The girl nodded and turned in her saddle for a last glimpse of the dusty city before a spur of the hills shut off her view.

It was graying slightly in the east the next morning when the patriarch Weekin mounted the roof of his observatory for a survey of the neighborhood. It was earlier than his usual time of rising, for he was a lover of heat and sunshine. The cool air of the hill country had settled to meet the warmer current of the flats, and formed a thin haze of fog, which floated over the thickly clustered dwellings. The cold shook Weekin's fat frame and the big paunch that gave evidence of his love of good living.

Apparently it was a dead town, or at least a sleeping one, which came under his observation, but from long experience he knew that it would come to life with the first cheery note of the morning whistle, the activity increasing as each variety of workers came on shift until within an hour after sunup the business of the day would be on in full swing.

Even now the town was not entirely surrendered to sleep, for in common with all well-organized cities Dog Town had its night workers, and in that bleak period between the lifting of night-time shadows and the coming of morning light these citizens of darkness were going off shift.

Weekin, the ancient prairie dog, shivered both from the cold and from his own daring in thus venturing forth before the rest of his kind. A sinister shape prowled among the mounds of the village, and Weekin

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withdrew to his doorway with only his head showing as he watched the marauding bobcat that moved as silently on padded feet as the thin pall of fog floated on the breeze. A hundred yards away loomed the bulk of a single gnarled pine.

From the dead snag at its top the night watchman blew two long hoots, followed by two short ones, the signal for the night prowlers to go off shift. Then the great horned owl left his perch on the snag and set sail for the dark mass of cottonwoods that marked a stream in the bottoms. The hunting cat turned toward Weekin's residence, strolling in casual fashion as if his sharp eyes had not detected the protruding head of its owner.

Weekin withdrew two feet within his entrance. He heard no sound. At the end of a minute he was satisfied that the cat had gone.

He moved almost to the mouth of the burrow and paused for another period. Outside, the cat was crouched flat six feet from the mound, his leg muscles bunched for a spring. The last foot of Weekin's burrow was a sheer drop. He mounted this last ascent and peered over the edge. A dark form was launched straight for his head, two hooked forepaws stretched to clutch him.

The reason for that sheer twelve inches of doorway was apparent, for Weekin simply released his hold and fell as the flashing claws dipped into the hole after him, and he scuttled down the sloping burrow that led back from the foot of the drop. The cat shoved his blunt

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muzzle into the hole and sniffed the tantalizing odor of live meat, then extended a forepaw far down the tunnel and gave a few tentative scratches before going on his way.

The old dog retired to a tiny shelf apartment of his own, while from a more spacious widening of the burrow a few feet beyond came the sounds of his good mate Weechi ministering to the wants of five hungry pups the size of half-grown rats. This same miracle had come to pass many times before—a litter of youngsters suddenly appearing in Weekin's home burrow to scamper about and disturb his naps.

He had snatched but forty winks when the first sweet note of the morning bugle call roused him. He made off down the tunnel, passed another family and mounted to an opening some distance from his favorite exit, remembering that the cat might still be lingering near his own door.

The first bright rays of the sun were just tipping the lightning-shattered snag of the pine, and struck a spark from the yellow breast of the meadow lark which now occupied the spot so lately occupied by the tufted killer of the night. He uptilted his head and loosed a flood of clear-ringing notes. On mound after mound little shapes appeared and balanced stiff and straight as Dog Town stood reveille. Two jack rabbits and a half-grown cottontail ceased their hopping and reared on their haunches, forefeet clear of the ground and their long ears erect as the lark sent forth the clamorous summons for all daylight workers to be up and doing.

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For a time the prairie dogs were inactive, frequently retiring to the burrows for warmth. The sun crawled down the pine and at last touched the mounds of the village. Then Dog Town came to life. Swarms of young dogs scampered out of the burrows and sat upright on the home mounds to absorb the heat of the morning rays. The last floating wisps of fog were dissipated. The cottontail had a hole of her own at the root of a sage, and she sat sleepily on the doorsill of her dwelling, surrounded by four little fluffy youngsters no larger than her head. Small as they were, these babies were ready to shift for themselves, as evidenced by the fact that they nibbled the tender shoots of grass that sprouted from a clump of prickly pear six feet from their door.

The two jack rabbits bedded down in the village. One of them nestled into the roots of a tuft of bunch grass. The other made a nest under a tumbleweed a little distance from Weekin's abode.

Dog Town was a beehive of activity. In a score of homes the families were busily engaged in cleaning out the rubble dislodged from roofs and walls by the capers of the young and the natural disintegration of the tunnel sides from exposure to the air. A horned lark speared a tiny grasshopper and flitted to the four ravenous nestlings that greeted her with open mouths. She deposited the morsel in one gaping maw and departed in search of more. A ground squirrel shoved the fresh earth of his recent excavation from the mouth of his tiny burrow and loosed his high-pitched chatter

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in triumphant self-approval, then balanced on his haunches, his slender body having all the appearance of a stake driven into the baked soil of the flat, a trait which had gained him the name of picket pin. A nighthawk brooded on two muddy-looking eggs that matched the bare soil on which she had deposited them without troubling to make even the semblance of a nest. She herself blended so well with her surroundings as to be almost invisible to the eye. On a dozen mounds throughout the village stood the aristocracy of the community, the burrowing owls that are part of every Dog Town.

These dignified pirates stood motionless, except for the wise blinking of their big eyes, balancing on legs grotesquely long when compared to the underpinning of other owls. They hunted both by day and by night, ravenous and ever hungry, and it required practically its own weight in food to keep each of these gluttons happy and content for a span of twenty-four hours.

Dog Town was suddenly roused to a tremendous pitch. Weekin sat on his mound and stretched himself to the greatest possible elevation as he peered off to determine the cause of excitement in the lower extremity of the village. The residents were barking angrily, the commotion spreading his way, and after a moment's observation Weekin raised his own voice in a steady, monotonous "Week! Week! Week!" Every note was jerked out with such violence that it shook his whole frame, and the short tail jerked stiffly as if

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to accent the sound. Dogs raced from one mound to the next in an effort to gain a better view of the monster that invaded Dog Town.

A badger, ordinarily a creature of the night, waddled between the mounds, his gross body rolling from side to side, belly almost dragging the ground as he advanced. The little owls of Dog Town are the most courteous creatures of all the plains. They bow alike to enemies and friends, a custom of their kind that is unalterable in peacetimes or in war. True to their code, they balanced with long legs wide apart, and between these stilts the fluffy bodies and overlarge heads worked as on pivots as they swept the intruder the most exaggerated bows. A few left their nests and circled over the enemy, screaming and snapping their beaks close to his ears, then alighted in his path and screamed again, the eerie notes accompanied by the ludicrous bobbing of head and body. This bobbing politeness was as much a part of them, as indispensable to every scream, as the stiff jerking of Weekin's tail was a necessary accompaniment of every bark.

The stupid badger was apparently unconscious of the uproar, and strolled on his way without heeding it, his little eyes inspecting the ground before him. The jack rabbit left his nest under the tumbleweed as the lurching form neared him. He hopped a few feet from the ponderous line of march and stopped. The badger eyed him speculatively as he passed. The picket pin

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whistled shrilly, and the invader turned and made for the sound. Weekin barked till his throat ached as the grim killer passed within a few feet of his door.

There was a sudden jar of hoofs as a dozen range horses thundered down to inspect the waddling shape. They circled round the badger, tails arched high. One wheeled in to face it, pawing the ground with his forefoot and loosing a whistling snort.

The badger showed his teeth, a curious lifting wrinkle and flattening of the nose which showed a red expanse of gums. He emitted a thick hiss such as might come from a giant snake. The horse whirled and lashed out with his heels, missing the badger by a wide margin. As the horses dashed away a battering hoof caved a section of the roof of Weekin's communication tunnel, which ran some ten inches below the surface to the home of a friend.

The badger proceeded to the tiny shaft that housed the picket pin. He sniffed the entrance, and from far down beneath him a defiant scolding apprised him of the fact that the little squirrel was at home. The invader's front paws were almost twice the size of his hind feet and armed with two-inch claws. He loosened the surface with these spading forks and started to excavate. In less than a minute his whole squat body was out of sight, and he did not even trouble to shove the loosened earth out behind him, but allowed it to settle back on him as he dug. In an incredibly short space of time he had reached the end of the tunnel and made a meal of the little squirrel. Then he

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settled down for a comfortable nap, sufficient air to supply his lungs reaching him through the loosened earth.

Dog Town settled down to normal. Weekin was an engineer of parts, but it was beyond his powers to roof over the break occasioned by the hammering feet of the range horse, so he contented himself with cleaning the rubbish from the floor of the tunnel. The five pups were busily engaged in excavation work of their own. Their efforts were confined to constructing side tunnels, and the dislodged earth was merely kicked back into the main house. Their program failed to include the removal of this refuse to outer air, and at least three times a day Weekin and his good mate Weechi were forced to clean house after their offspring.

Weekin completed his task and slept at the mouth of his burrow. The sun glared down on the blistered flat and its heat was grateful to his old bones. Little quivering waves blurred the perspective at any great distance. The lone pine in the center of the town had a list to eastward, warped from the standing west winds of many years. The shattered snag served as a look-out point for any passing members of the feathered tribes. Three chattering magpies alighted there for a rest. A wheeling hawk screamed at high noon and spiraled down to perch on the snag as the magpies left it.

After several hours of strenuous activity Dog Town indulged in a siesta and snoozed under the burning sun. The big red shoulder preened his feathers on the look-

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out snag. The jack rabbit had not even returned to his bed or troubled to make a new one after being disturbed, but had merely squatted down in the open to resume his nap. The little owls blinked sedately on their mounds. Weekin slept at the mouth of his burrow. He opened one eye as his quick ear caught the patter of tiny feet. A horned toad advanced by short darts, and at last chose a spot a few yards from the old dog and rested, its sides throbbing as if from shortness of breath. A terrapin, with gaudy black and orange decorations on his shining back, trailed awkwardly along on his bandy legs and halted facing Weekin. He withdrew his head inside the armor of his shell and the little red-rimmed eyes peered forth and regarded the sleeping prairie dog. The horned lark made one last trip with a squirming insect for her nestlings, then settled down beside the nest to drowse.

Dog Town slumbered; no sound or movement except the droning of bees among the blossoms of the prickly pear, an occasional flash of red or orange as some restless hopper tossed into the air with a grating crackle of wings, and the gentle, sleepy crooning of a pair of mourning doves.

Up on the lip of the mesa, behind a sage brush blind, the man and the girl had laid aside the glasses and were partaking of a noonday lunch. For half an hour Dog Town snoozed in the white glare of the sun. Then there sounded a low humming, which increased in volume, the hissing screech of mighty wings planing through the air. Startled prairie dogs straightened

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with a snap and gazed aloft at the great bird boring down out of the blue with frightful velocity and headed for the center of the village. Weekin barked once. A suddenly wakened owl near him bobbed in honor of the darting monarch of the skies and screamed a greeting. Dog Town came back from slumber with a rush. Frightened dogs sought their burrows.

The jack rabbit roused from his doze and made two dazed hops. A black shadow threw him into a panic, and he darted off just too late. The pirate of the air was upon him with a hiss of wings, tipped dizzily and struck. The gripping talons met in the big jack's body, and he had paid the penalty of incautiously napping in the open. The dogs crept to their doors to see a huge golden eagle moving off with the luckless jack dangling limply from the murderous claws, his labored flapping in sharp contrast to the graceful sweep of his downward rush of an instant past. The hawk screamed congratulations as his lord passed above his perch. The big red shoulder pitched from the snag and soared low across the flats toward the distant line of cottonwoods. A huge black raven took up the lookout point on the snag so recently deserted by the hawk.

The little owls were ravenous after the brief siesta, and set forth to duplicate the eagle's feat. Weekin's pups darted down the burrow as a hungry owl hovered four feet overhead and glared down at them with great terrifying eyes, but the old dog held his ground. The sun was hot on the terrapin's armored back, and he resumed his aimless journey. The owl wheeled

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toward the movement and dropped in the terrapin's path. Again the journey was arrested as the long neck and blunt head were drawn within the sheltering case, while the beady eyes regarded the beak-snapping apparition that blocked his way. He recognized the feathered comedian with his exaggerated bows of false courtesy, and he went on his way. The owl rose with a flying hop and stationed himself on the glistening shell, reaching down to drive his powerful beak at the opening through which the ugly head had so lately protruded. The terrapin was a placid creature of unhurried ways. Delay meant nothing to him. He simply waited with unruffled patience for the owl to depart.

The horned toad moved and the owl's sharp eyes picked him out from the mottled gravel that matched his horny back. As the toad raced away the owl launched in pursuit and drove savage claws into his prey before it could gain the shelter of a dog hole. All through Dog Town the winged appetites were killing. One feasted on a very young dog which had strayed too far from home. Others were feeding on the grasshoppers that pitched from one patch of prickly pear to the next with crackling, bright-flashing wings. For perhaps an hour the pillage went on, but strangely enough it created no particular excitement in Dog Town. This was a regular daily program, and the dogs had evidently come to accept it. There sounded an occasional angry barking as an owl hovered low over some burrow that housed a litter of young or

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made a swoop at some incautious pup, but there was no general concerted barking such as greeted the entrance of any alien intruder into the village. The old dogs went about their work and warned the pups to take cover whenever one exposed itself outside a burrow.

In the main, the food of the owls consisted of insects, crawfish, mice and lizards, with only now and then a dog thrown in for variety. The owl tribe, after gorging, became inactive and sat stupidly on their mounds, stuffed to repletion, and the pups came once more from the burrows and frisked in the open. Peace and contentment brooded over the village for a brief period, and Dog Town made the most of it.

Dogs visited from one burrow to the next and greeted old friends. Pups romped and chased one another from hole to hole. Weekin set forth and called at the home of a neighbor. The old couple had a vacancy in the family, one pup less than on the occasion of Weekin's last visit. An old rattler that had taken up his abode in that end of the village was responsible for this disappearance. After a brief parley the old dog moved on to another home. The two proud parents displayed a full family of seven youngsters almost half grown, reporting not a single casualty during the spring season.

The clamor of many voices sounded again through the village as if all wished to be heard at once. The girl on the hill crest, a hundred yards from the edge of town, swept the neighborhood for signs of approaching enemies, then gazed aloft to determine whether the

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menace came from the sky, certain that the commotion must have been occasioned by some fresh danger. But the man knew that such was not the case. He recognized the difference in tone. This was but the care-free chatter of contentment, Dog Town voices raised in good cheer and play. The steady, monotonous bark of stormy times was absent, and from portions of the community rose a voluble excited chatter, while individual voices frequently rose above the rest, peeling out and running the whole range of prairie-dog scale in a whistling trill.

Weekin traveled from mound to mound in an irregular loop, and on his way his trail crossed and re-crossed those of other visiting dogs. The circuit was almost completed, and he set out across a bare, gravel-flecked expanse for home. All through the day the nighthawk had nestled on the two mottled eggs. Her broad face was relieved only by a ridiculously short bill that protruded but a quarter of an inch from the head which had gained her the name of bull bat.

The old prairie dog rambled carelessly on his way, heading directly down upon the nesting bull bat, whose feather scheme rendered her almost indiscernible among the grayish flint scraps dotting the wind-scoured flat. She watched him come, and when within two feet of her it was apparent that he would gallop straight across her unless summarily challenged. The short beak opened and the wide head seemed split apart by this simple move, for the beak, though protruding but

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a fraction from the face, slanted well back and traversed the whole of it.

Weekin planted his feet and halted in awful fear as a gaping red maw confronted him. From this fearsome throat issued a horrible crackling hiss, accompanied by a ruffling of feathers and limp tremor of half-spread wings. In one awful split second Weekin thought of the gaping mouth of the weasel, the hiss of the rattler and a host of other gruesome things. He rolled over backward in his haste to escape from the dread creature, which seemed about to spring upon him. He dashed off as he regained his feet, looked back to see if he were pursued, and—recognized the harmless little nighthawk. From near-by dog mounds came the derisive mirth of neighbors. Weekin turned and strolled back past the threatening red mouth with its terrifying hisses.

On each of three consecutive afternoons he had been thrown into a panic by this same bird. By the following day he would forget it and experience another severe shock as he passed the same spot; the next day likewise, and the next.

When he reached home and took up his stand on his own observatory the terrapin came to life. For the better part of two hours the sluggard had meditated about the dangers of life. It now occurred to his prehistoric mind that the owl which had pecked at him some hours before might very probably have departed. The ugly head was thrust from the casing for a survey.

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The long neck writhed about, then the armored hulk lumbered into action and headed straight for Weekin's door.

The old dog barked warningly as the terrapin showed no sign of changing his course. When within a foot of him an explosive note caused a withdrawal of the head, and for perhaps a minute the little eyes sized Weekin up with grave scrutiny. Then the interrupted journey was resumed. A few hitches and the terrapin reached his goal, which was the mouth of Weekin's burrow. He slid over the edge, tumbled down the first sheer drop and scrambled away down the sloping tunnel. Far within the house his good mate Weechi was ministering to the wants of the hungry pups, and her surprised clamor announced her discovery of the unwelcome guest.

He was entirely harmless to the dog family, merely an inconvenience, and Weechi considered him in much the same light that a housewife would regard a restless barrel in her nursery. It was entirely possible that the terrapin, feeling secure in this sheltered retreat, might lapse into happy slumber and visit them for a week. Weechi scolded till she grew hoarse, but the terrapin refused to stir.

Weekin sat erect on his mound and took an active interest in all that transpired within his field of view. A friend left a burrow some fifty yards away and started toward him across the gravel flat. There came again the crackling hiss as he neared the bull bat, and his antics were much the same as Weekin's own a few

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minutes past. From all sides rose the jeering cachinnations of Dog-Town wags, and Weekin chattered as merrily as the rest at his friend's discomfiture.

Twenty yards from Weekin's door stood a deserted burrow. The edges were crumbling and showed long disuse. A spider web blocked all but the lower portion of the entrance, evidence that the deserted mansion was not even visited by dogs in play. This old ruin was shunned by the inhabitants, its status in Dog Town identical with that of the old house which sits alone in nearly every village of man—house of tragedy which rumor has peopled with haunts. Weekin's family had originally consisted of six pups, but one of them when very young had frisked inside the forbidden opening and never rejoined the family circle.

A sinister head was thrust from the crumbling entrance, its beady eyes staring wickedly. As Weekin watched it the long sinuous body followed the head, and a giant rattler advanced into the open with a horrible, writhing glide. The thing moved but a few feet, and drowsed in the heat of the sun, the thick body stretched in a wavering line. Occasionally the blunt head was elevated a few inches as the monster peered nearsightedly about him.

An owl hovered above him and screeched. The long body was galvanized to convulsive action with the sound, and drew into tight coils by a sucking contraction, the head upraised and darting in all directions. The tail was erected above the coil and vibrated with

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fury, the warning rattle reaching the ears of every dog within a radius of seventy yards. Three feet above his head the little owl screamed again and snapped his beak, then dropped to the ground and capered before the big serpent.

The hen owl took his place in the air. The feathered warrior spraddled and bowed a few feet from the vicious head, while the hen lashed the rattler to stupid fury by her screams and beak snaps close above him. Then the coil was released with the snap of a coiled spring as the rattler struck. The savage head was driven straight at the bobbing owl with incredible speed, but the blow fell short. The hen owl swooped with the strike and drove her powerful beak at the base of the broad head as it flattened on the ground. If the snake had been smaller the two little owls would have slain it, but the rattler was a giant of his kind, a formidable enemy, and it would have required hours of constant fighting to vanquish it, with a good margin for chance of a mishap to themselves. For three days in succession the feathered pair had beset the snake as soon as it appeared outside the deserted burrow, and it was within the bounds of possibility that they would batter out the evil eyes and kill it at their leisure on the next such event, its size and strength notwithstanding.

The old rattler wriggled back to the sheltering burrow, and the two little owls stood and peered down the entrance, bobbing grotesquely, as if indulging in mutual congratulations over having driven the enemy from the field.

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The meadow larks had built their nest outside the confines of the village and the male lark crossed and recrossed Dog Town, flitting a few feet above the mounds with his peculiar mode of flight—a few swift flaps and a short coast, another series of wing beats and another ten-foot sail. On each crossing he swept up to the snag and fluted a few bars before going on his way.

Two range cows wandered into the village and pressed against the slanting trunk of the ancient pine as they rubbed the shedding hair from their coats. The lone tree was a favorite rubbing post for all stock passing through Dog Town. A wide saucer-shaped depression ringed it. Day after day for many years the feet of range animals had trampled round the tree, and the winds had scoured away the dust raised by their hoofs, leaving this queer hollow.

The sun's rays were slanting, the heat less intense. The cows left off their rubbing and bedded at the foot of the tree. Weekin straightened with a snap as a single sharp note sounded from the far edge of town. The ears of man could have detected no difference between this note and the rest, but all Dog Town knew it for a signal that danger was abroad. The careless chatter ceased abruptly. Dog Town was on guard. The sharp-eyed dog which had sounded that first warning now followed it up by the monotonous "Week! Week! Week!" at regularly spaced intervals. Others took it up and it spread throughout the town as more and more of the dwellers spied the arch villain of the wild.

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Burrows could provide no shelter against the one who came now, for the assassin's body was of less thickness than that of the big rattler and he could follow through a tunnel a quarter the size of the smallest dog hole. His speed was greater than that of the paunchy prairie dogs. When the weasel came to Dog Town it was but a question of which victim he would choose.

A pair of fighting owls hovered over him, but with this able slayer they failed to light in his path and bow as they had done with others. The lithe weasel was of deadly temper and quick as the owls themselves. The hen owl snapped her beak above him, and the little killer's mouth opened with a flash of fangs as he emitted a spitting snarl. As the owl sailed over him again the slender body was launched in the air to meet it, flipped upward as if propelled by a spring. He missed the owl by six inches, and went on his course.

The weasel dipped down a dog hole, and there was a general exodus of the panic-stricken dwellers from the mouth of another opening twenty feet beyond. Every well-ordered family in Dog Town had its back door, and frequently more than one. The deadly little animal meandered through communication tunnels from one burrow to the next, and his course was marked by a swarm of prairie dogs popping from near-by exits and streaking for the doubtful safety of a distant hole. Three times he appeared on the surface, coming from one burrow only to stroll a few feet and dip once more underground by way of the next, and each time he appeared he was drawing nearer to Weekin's home.

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He was in no hurry, and seemed to enjoy the stark fear his entrance had created in the heart of every villager, playing with them before making his kill. But it was not the way of the weasel to play with his victim or withhold his strike. He was all business, and his business was to kill. His lust for blood was too intense and uncontrolled to allow of his holding back, once his prey was sighted. His failure to fasten himself on the throat of a dog came not from a catlike spirit of play, but from indifference, for he was barely conscious of the scurrying dogs, his nose and eyes questing for some sign of a cottontail, his favorite prey.

Weekin peered from his burrow, only his nose visible above the mound. The weasel's head was raised from a hole twenty yards away. Then he moved out into the open and headed for Weekin's door. The old dog watched him come, his heart thumping with sheer terror. One more second and he would have dropped from sight and raced along his tunnel for another exit, but the little killer changed his course.

His air of casual strolling was transformed into one of deadly eagerness to kill as he darted for the mouth of the hole in which the cottontail family made its home. Four baby rabbits made hasty exit as he disappeared within. Two cowered down at the roots of a sage. One fled down the mouth of the crumbling burrow of fear from which those which entered nevermore returned—the lair of the giant rattler. The fourth squeezed past Weekin and took refuge in the big room with the trembling pups.

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A dull thumping sounded from underground, the drumming feet of the mother rabbit as she died with the killer fastened on her throat. For half an hour the town was wrapped in the silence of fear except for the occasional screams of the dauntless little owls.

Then the killer emerged from the burrow, a smear of blood on his sinister face, and moved on out of the village.

The pine tree cast a shadow that stretched to the eastern extremity of the village as Dog Town resumed business. The two mourning doves commenced their plaintive cooing in anticipation of coming night. The meadow lark took up his stand on the snag and waited in silence. As the first rays of the rising sun had touched him there in early morning, so now the last tongue of light set off his bright colors as the sun pitched behind the hills. He faced now to the west, where in the morning he had faced the east. With uptilted head he ushered out the sun and gave thanks for a day well spent.

The crisp cool that follows the dry heat of the foothills made itself felt immediately after sundown, fresh breezes seeming to steal out across the parched flats from the breaks of the adjacent hills, where the sun's glare had driven them earlier in the day.

A rasping cry drew Dog Town's collective gaze aloft. The nighthawk had taken to the air. The insects of the early night had come forth from hiding and the bull bat preyed on them, soaring above the village with spirals and loops, side slips and eccentric darts and dips as her

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wide maw gathered in her prey. Others joined her, their white-banded wings flashing against the sky. Two bats, straying far from timber, wheeled and maneuvered among the nighthawks.

As the little owls had hunted near the surface, so now a general hunt was on in the higher air, and the rasp of the bull bats had replaced the earlier shrieks of the owls. The young dogs had been summoned within and only a part of their elders remained on the mounds.

A pointed black muzzle split by a white streak was thrust from a hole at the upper edge of the village. A big prairie skunk moved into the open and a host of smaller shapes swarmed out of the den at her heels.

These youngsters were scarcely larger than the ground squirrel which had met his fate at the hands of the badger earlier in the day. The big narrow stripe marched proudly, displaying her gorgeous plume. The eight kits frisked and sported in her wake.

The settling cool of night had chilled the active hoppers that had flashed above the village with ratcheting wing, and they now rested dormant and sluggish, at the roots of the sage. The prairie mother was already instructing her offspring in the art of self-support. She sought out the hoppers and gave them a single bite before leaving them for the kits, which fell on them with tiny snarls. There were frequent disputes, and their voices when raised resembled closely the squeals of rats. A few, more precocious than the rest, were foraging for themselves and ferreting out their own hoppers without maternal aid.

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When the family neared Weekin's home there was a sudden upheaval of loose earth directly in the path, a tossing and bulging of the surface as the badger roused from his nap and made his way to the open air. He found himself facing the family of skunks. Merely by way of warning him to steer clear of her young, the mother skunk thumped out the danger sign. This action was not the heavy thump of hind feet as executed by rabbits or hares, but performed with the broad padded forefeet. She stretched her forepaws far out toward the badger, then drew them back with a clawing, scraping motion till her back was arched high, all four feet planted in a group, following it up with two sharp thumps of the forepaws with the whole weight of the body behind the blows. Three times she repeated this move.

Weekin had retreated to his burrow as these two met. Directly over his head the thumps boomed hollowly as if his dwelling were a naturae drum. The badger stared at the plumed leader of the striped family, then turned and waddled the opposite way.

The old prairie dog went to his front door for one last look around before holing up for the night. Objects at a little distance were blurred and indistinct. Night was shutting down on Dog Town. A great shape floated silently overhead as the great horned owl winged toward the snag. Weekin could see him silhouetted against the sky as he ruffled his feathers after lighting.

The darkness thickened till the form on the snag

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was but a shapeless blot swimming in obscurity. Only Weekin's nose appeared outside his burrow. Four gruff hoots summoned the night workers of the flats to come on shift. Weekin padded off down his tunnel and curled up for the night.

Up on the mesa the man and the girl had headed toward their horses, picketed in a blind basin farther back.

"Do you still believe that life in that little parched town is monotonous and devoid of interest and events?" he asked.

"No," the girl confessed. "I'll take it back. Weekin must be a nervous wreck after a day like that."

"That's Weekin's regular lot in life," he said. "It was no more than an average Dog-Town day."

From far down in the flats an eerie soprano voice was raised, a pealing, shrill, staccato ripping up and down the scale. Voice after voice joined till it seemed that the music issued from a thousand throats as the coyote chorus sounded the Dog-Town taps.

THE BLACK AND CINNAMON TWINS



HERE is a strip of country in the backbone of the Rockies where men have looked upon this strange thing with their own eyes, so many, in fact, that it is established as a certainty. Those of undoubted veracity have sworn that the terrible cinnamon will

mother the orphaned cubs of the black bear. Others affirm that they have seen cinnamon cubs in company with those of raven hue following a black she-bear through the hills and that the foster mother cared for them impartially.

Since that time when the earliest traders penetrated the land of the Shoshones and reported the discovery of the cinnamon bear there has never been a doubt as to his exceedingly dangerous qualities as contrasted to those of the harmless black bear; yet the overwhelming mass of evidence that each will adopt the orphaned cubs of the other points to some sort of relationship, difference in temperament notwithstanding.

The Shoshones had considered this relationship so close that they spoke of them as one tribe, the tribe of Wakin, calling the cinnamon Wakinoo and the black

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bear Wakinee, names given to them in the beginning by the Great God Manitou, the first Shoshone.

It was a fact well known to the Shoshones that Manitou had endowed those of the tribe of Wakin with eyesight which was but indifferent when compared to their highly developed senses of scent and hearing. Perhaps this inferior sense of sight accounts for the fact that there is no color line drawn between bears in the Western hills.

When Wakinoo, the cinnamon cub, came from the den for his first glimpse of light he observed Wakinee, a coal-black cub, standing just outside. Perhaps they could see no difference in the shade of their coats or it may be they did see it and passed it by as immaterial. In any event each accepted the other on the spot as a friend and brother.

Wakinee extended a forepaw and made a tentative jab at Wakinoo to determine whether or not the cinnamon cub would fight. He would—and countered with one paw while he landed a sound cuff with the other. They wrestled and boxed until the crying need for food called them back to the den to nurse a big black she-bear.

The old bear had been restless for several days and so was now easily wakened. When their tugging annoyed her she opened one eye and regarded them. She may have been surprised to find a cinnamon cub in her family circle, but even this strange occurrence did not rouse her sufficiently to prevent her from almost immediately resuming her nap.

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While she slept the cubs wandered outside the den.

Curiosity blossomed in them with each new sound.

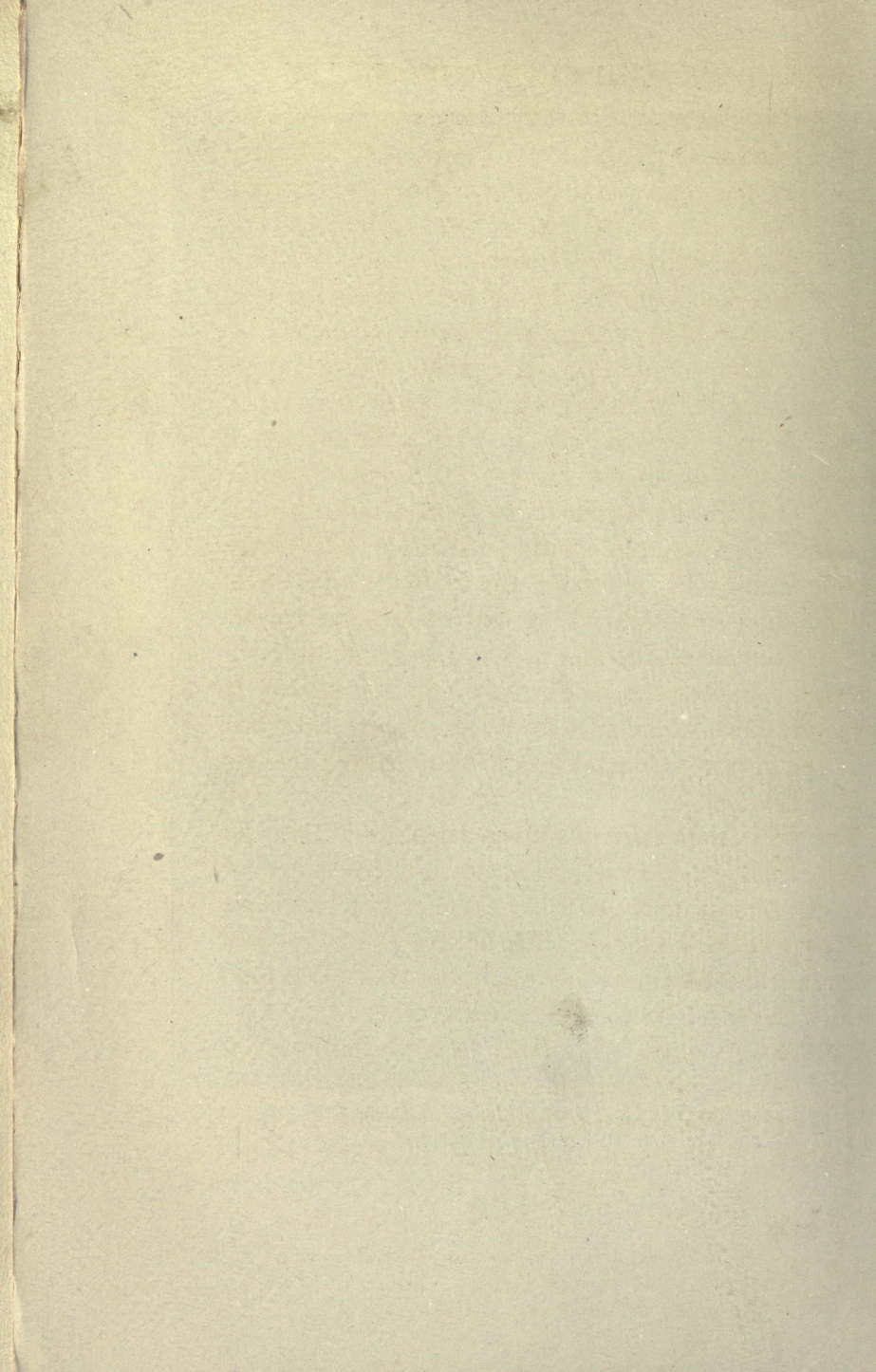
A squirrel chattered in the timber and both cubs hurried to the spot. The squirrel had small use for bears; they were prone to rob his nut and pine-cone caches in the fall and so deprive him of full winter rations. He whisked down the tree and darted along a low-hanging dead limb, stopping a bare four feet above their heads where he crouched flat and scolded them. His rapid, short-clipped "Keek!" was jerked out so violently in his indignation that his whole body moved with it and the long tail stiffened angrily with each note.

Wakinoo stood upon his hind feet and reached for him, and the chatter rose to a frenzied pitch. Wakinee tried the tree trunk and climbed it, feeling certain that he was the inventor of this new mode of travel. The cinnamon cub followed him, but the squirrel fled from limb to limb and leaped to another tree.

The old bear was fully awake at last and set forth to wander across the hills in search of food. Wakinoo and Wakinee learned and classified many things, mainly scents and sounds. Before they had been a month from the den they could distinguish between the scuffling gait of the bear and the firmer tread of hoofed game, the hopping of a rabbit from the soft-footed patter of the cat beasts—knew all of these at a much greater distance than the ear of man could have detected the mere sound itself.



"Wakinoo stood on his hind feet and reached for him and the chatter rose to a frenzied pitch."



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Their lives were governed by The Law the same as all other animals. The Law of the endless circle prescribed by the Great God Manitou who had decreed that life as a whole should go on forever, but that the span of each individual's life should be short and fleeting. While each one lived he should reproduce life, and when he died his energy and motion would not be lost but consumed and utilized by those who fed upon him and so give renewed energy to other life that it might go on through death. And Manitou had accorded to each animal his own niche and purpose in The Law and his own relation to the endless circle.

Men credit animals with instinctive knowledge when in reality that wisdom is the result of experience. The Shoshones had known that only one characteristic, that of the species' relation to The Law, is instinctive. The grizzly is courage in The Law and that quality is born with him; to the antlered tribes is given fear, and from the instant of birth it is known to them that fear is their portion.

The tribe of Wakin was given friendliness, and so, it being their guide in life, came to them instinctively. All the animals of the hills were first viewed through the near-sighted eyes of friendliness. And it was through this habit of investigation that Wakinoo learned the etiquette of feeding time.

He chanced across a big black bear who alternately stirred an ant heap with his forepaw and dipped his nose in it. Wakinoo rushed up to him for a closer view and found the old fellow in a friendly mood,

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but this was transformed to one of amazed indignation when Wakinoo thrust his own nose into the ant hill. The big he-bear chased the cinnamon cub far from the spot and cuffed him at every jump.

It was only after a great variety of such experiences that Wakinoo learned that friendship ceases in the presence of food, that even the most friendly overtures are taboo at feeding time.

Wakinoo had entered the world in that country which Manitou, in the beginning had designed as a paradise of plenty for his Shoshone children, the chosen ones, and had willed that it be called the Land of Many Rivers. Prior to Wakinoo's birth the white men had reserved and set aside a great tract of this one-time stamping ground of the Shoshones as a playgrounds for future generations of whites, calling it Yellowstone.

The black-and-tan family had wandered aimlessly for some months, but in mid June the old bear traveled steadily in one direction, seeming to have some definite objective, and eventually the cinnamon cub smelled many odors rolled into one which spoke of unlimited variety of food. The black cub, too halted with uplifted nose to drink in this delicious fragrance. They forged ahead, then halted once more and sat upon their haunches to study out the meaning of the strange thing before them.

A rambling structure of logs stood upon the lip of a hill, the first crude beginning of the great hotel

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system of the future, and those who moved about it were among the first of the adventurous travelers to penetrate this far wilderness.

Wakinoos had known many animals but none like these. He had seen the brush houses and log dams of the beaver colonies, the close-grouped mounds of prairie-dog villages in the foothills. It was evidence of his sagacity that he linked these memories of the past with the scene of the present and knew this log jam for the den of these new beasts.

Many of them were standing near a great assortment of garbage tossed from the slope above. This could mean but one thing—feeding time—and Wakinoos's approach was, therefore cautious. Friendliness was rampant within him and drew him forward against his better judgment. He halted and looked across at them. They stood very still and Wakinoos stooped to eat a half-decayed vegetable that had never before appeared on his menu, but throughout the operation his eyes were on the men. One of them made a sudden shift of position and Wakinoos fled, having good cause to be suspicious of any quick move made at feeding time.

Friendliness drew him back and this time Wakinees and the old bear went with him.

The word spread that the black bear who had fed there the year before had returned, bringing her own cub and an adopted cinnamon, and all those who had come to see the wonders of the Yellowstone gathered

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now to view the greatest wonder of all—bears, the most savage of all animals, coming peacefully among men.

Friendliness had persisted in the face of a thousand generations of relentless persecution and here, in this first spot where the murderous rifles of men were silenced by law, friendliness brought Wakinoo's family in to feed in the haunts of man, the first time this unheard-of thing had come to pass.

All through the summer Wakinoo found food in abundance and grew to look upon men as the pleasant companions of bears. Men offered him food, the only animals he had known to do this. At first he drew back when they held out some tidbit with extended arm. He was suspicious of any such move from having felt the weight of innumerable cuffs. An agonizing first experiment with a porcupine had deepened this feeling and taught him that friendliness had best be conducted at a distance which prevented actual contact. These scruples were worn down at last, and before the season ended Wakinoo had no hesitancy about rearing up and placing his forefeet against a man to enable him to reach some high-held morsel.

His mother left this feeding ground in the early fall, crossing out over the Sylvan Pass and down the headwaters of the Shoshone.

Wakinoo had no way of knowing but what all men were the best hearted of beasts. Once across the pass his mother's tactics changed. She traveled through the hills more warily than ever before, and the cubs

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could see no apparent reason for this sudden access of caution.

Wakinoos caught the man scent ahead of them in a box canon up which they were traveling and headed joyously toward its source. The old she-bear cuffed him back in the opposite direction. Her whole manner showed great uneasiness.

This maneuver was repeated each succeeding time they scented man until at last Wakinoos was busily trying to reconstruct his ideas of men. The old bear's attitude toward them was now reversed, and she avoided them as persistently as she had sought them in the Yellowstone. The scent of friendship was now the danger scent. Wakinoos eventually decided that there were two kinds of men; that those who lived together in big log dens were the friendliest of all animals while these single, homeless ones whose lone trails they crossed in the hills were dangerous in the extreme. They had not been long across the pass when this half-formed thought was verified.

They were crossing an open side hill when Wakinoos caught the scent and saw a single man appear suddenly on the ridge. The old bear wheeled and ran, the cubs racing after her. Wakinoos heard the thud as the ball struck his mother a split second before the report reached him. The old bear traveled steadily through the timber, but her gait slackened, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that she kept her feet. Wakinoos heard the wheezing rush of air that rattled with every breath. She crept under a windfall at last, and the

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two frightened cubs snuggled close to her during the two days that she lay without a move. Then the rattling ceased. Hunger drove Wakinoo forth the morning of the third day and Wakinee followed him. They alternately fed and returned to the still form of their mother, holding to this routine until assured at last that the vigil was a hopeless one and that she would never wander with them again. They left the windfall to face the unknown together.

Their fare now consisted mainly of grasshoppers, ants, and berries, and they found no lack of food. Always when tired they bedded down together, rolling up in one ball as if finding safety in companionship. Man had brought this tragedy upon them, and Wakinoo never let this vanish from his mind for a single instant; yet behind it all a memory of the friendly days at the big log den in the Yellowstone persisted in his thoughts.

It was this that led him to linger in the Shoshone bottoms and sniff longingly at the odor of frying meat which the wind one day carried to him. It spoke to him of those other days. The dread man scent mingled with it, yet he worked carefully upwind toward its source.

Wakinoo peered from the timber edge at the base of a forested slope and saw a log den in an open meadow. A single great water spruce grew at its corner.

Two men sat before the cabin, and Wakinoo gazed long at them and sniffed hungrily of the conglomerate

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odor that emanated from within. His coal-black brother licked his lips noisily beside him. Friendliness was calling. The knowledge that men who lived together in dens were harmless was gaining the ascendancy over the dread inspired by those wandering, dangerous men—two clearly established facts pulling in opposite directions.

Friendliness triumphed and Wakinoo shuffled from the timber and sat down in the open while Wakinee remained in the last fringe of trees.

Wakinoo did not know that one of these men, Matt Lear, had gained widespread fame as the most able killer of his day. He only knew that here were two men who lived together in a den, and so, according to past pacts, must naturally be friendly.

Matt Lear had studied the habits of all animals of the hills with the single-hearted purpose of attaining the highest efficiency as a killer. He had reached his chosen goal. No man in all the hills knew the ways of every beast from the grizzly to the hare so surely as he, nor without this knowledge could any man qualify to take rank in his class as a superkiller. It was the very fullness of his knowledge that had carried him even beyond his original goal to a clearer understanding and so curbed his initial intent.

He was and always would be a killer. It was in the nature of his parentage and environment that he should live by killing, yet through the research intended to fit him for his calling had been born the desire to kill only with discrimination and with self-

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imposed restriction. A new perspective had come to him with his first meeting with the surgeon, Enright, who came yearly to hunt on the Shoshone. It was through Enright that he had first learned the real purpose of Manitou's endless circle of life through death; that the balancing of the numbers of the animal tribes through interminable killing was but secondary. He knew now that The Law was not a circle but a spiral marking the improvement of the tribes; that the killing fell first upon the weaklings and so weeded out the inefficient, while those better equipped with quickened senses lived beyond the mass and through the survival of the fittest the best of each kind found a longer span of life in which to reproduce and so to improve that kind.

It was also through Enright that he had turned his fund of woodlore to far greater financial account than would have been possible by mere indiscriminate killing for the value of hide and fur. There is a latent spark in all red-blooded men, a throwback to the primitive, which is manifested in a desire to get out into the open and close to the heart of Nature. Those who listen to its call and yet whose lives have not fitted them to understand the open, must have others to point the way. Matt Lear's fame as a guide had spread until his days were full, and those who would hunt or fish paid far more to have him pilot them through the hills than they would pay to others—which was fitting for in return he gave them the

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benefit of a greater knowledge than any other who followed the same calling could give.

His heart and pride were in his chosen business, and, like those who excel in other lines, he looked carefully to its future. And so it came about that the one man best equipped to kill was the first to advocate the wise limitation of killing. Above all else, he made a determined effort to stop the senseless slaughter that was exterminating the tribe of Wakin.

Matt Lear, the first-known defender of bears, looked across a hundred-yard strip of open meadow and saw Wakinoos, the first cinnamon cub that had ever made friends with man in the Yellowstone. He touched Enright's arm and pointed, speaking the Shoshone diminutive.

"Ne-Wakinoos, little cinnamon," he said. "If the she-bear does not discover him he will come up to have a look at us."

Wakinoos advanced a few yards and stopped again. Several times he repeated this move until he was but a short ten yards from the two men, his eager sniffing of the fried-meat perfume plainly audible to them. Then Enright gasped with surprise as a coal-black cub came from the timber and Wakinee shuffled across the flat and took up his stand a few yards behind Wakinoos. Both cubs whisked away as Matt Lear arose and moved inside the cabin, then returned as he came out and resumed his seat.

Wakinoos swung in a circle about the cabin with

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Wakinee circling beyond him. The two men heard his snuffing investigation in the rear of the house and soon his head was thrust around the near corner as he inspected them. A black muzzle appeared below the brown one. Wakinee was squeezing under his cinnamon brother to take a look for himself.

Lear tossed a bacon rind, and Wakinoo came forth to seize it. A second piece lured the black cub from his corner. Scraps of bread, meat, and vegetables were showered upon them. Wakinoo now felt perfectly at home. His hunger satisfied, he was inclined to romp. He reached out and cuffed Wakinee's head roughly, then fled with the black cub in hot pursuit.

Their gait was seemingly but an awkward gallop, yet it carried them over the ground with remarkable speed. Wakinoo's hind legs were flung far to the sides and forward, overreaching his front feet at every jump. Three times they circled the cabin at top speed before he was overtaken. They rolled and wrestled, then stood upon their hind feet and boxed, all within ten feet of Enright, and the man looked on as if in a dream. The bout ceased as abruptly as it had started and Wakinoo walked up to Matt Lear while his brother investigated the wondering Enright.

The two cubs retired to the foot of the tree and sprawled there comfortably, Wakinoo on his side and Wakinee behind him with his head resting on the cinnamon cub so that he might look across him at the two

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men. Enright drew a long breath and spoke for the first time.

"I never really believed the tales I've heard—but this proves that cinnamons and black bears will travel together."

"And naturally," said Matt Lear, "for they are born together. Except for color, there is no such animal, my friend, as a cinnamon bear. His fur is brown but the terrible cinnamon is no more than a color phase of the peaceable black bear."

And Enright, who had seen cinnamon bears so labeled in many parks and had read of their ferocity throughout his life, proved his absolute confidence in Matt Lear's wisdom by never doubting for a single instant that this queer thing was true. When Lear made a statement relative to any animal in the hills there was no particle of use to go behind that statement—it was the truth.

Matt Lear's god was Manitou, the first Shoshone, and so the direct ancestor of his mother, Meteetse, the last Shoshone princess. He knew that there was no animal habit, no smallest detail of coloring but what had its own purpose woven into The Law of the endless circle. This one friend, Enright, was the only man with whom he spoke of Manitou and his works. The minds of these two men were well attuned; when the one spoke of an animal's purpose in working of Nature and the other replied in the terms of that same animal's relation to Manitou's endless circle, there was no

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lack of understanding. They were both of the great outdoors, too broad to quibble over petty differences of creed, and with the Creator's works unfolding daily before their eyes it mattered little by what name He was known to them.

And so, while Wakinoo, the cinnamon cub, opened his eyes and blinked at them as they talked, Matt Lear told Enright more of the cinnamon bear than Wakinoo would ever know of himself.

Each animal's relation to The Law of the circle is largely determined by appetite. Manitou accorded the bear an appetite which is the pivotal point in the circle and it may be that his relation, friendliness, comes from the fact that his appetite begins in the middle and works both ways. He eats the food of the killers and nonkillers and all else in between, while he himself belongs strictly to neither class. The very nature of his everlasting search for variety in food leads him across every description of country. The range of the cinnamon is in the Western hills, the particular land over which Manitou presides, and to every beast Manitou has given some measure of protective coloration. His wisdom was too great to give a one-country color to an animal with an all-country appetite in this land where colors are profuse, so in the Land of Many Rivers, the very center of the cinnamon range, he caused a full half of the black bears to be born with brown fur. Ninety per cent of the black-and-brown she-bears give birth to cubs of both shades, and it is only infrequently that a she-bear followed by two cubs

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of the same color is ever seen in the hills. Wakinoo and Wakinee, when traveling together, would always find some color in their background with which one of them would merge.

When searching for insects among brownish rotten logs Wakinoo would be hard to distinguish from his surroundings; when gathering berries among the blackened stumps of a burning Wakinee would blend while his cinnamon brother would loom up. And so on through all their travels, one at least protected from the eyes of enemies by his color. It may be that Wakinoo's fabled ferocity came in the beginning from some hunter who, not knowing one bear from another, wounded a brownish-furred grizzly and immediately thereafter found excellent reason for spreading tales of exceeding savagery, which in his ignorance he laid at the door of Wakinoo, the harmless cinnamon.

Whatever the cause of the libel, Wakinoo gave living testimony of the falsity of the fact itself when he suddenly left his bed and trotted across to Enright, rearing up on his hind feet as he surveyed him with an eye for possible gifts of food. Appetite and friendliness were working together and there was no sign of future savagery about him.

Matt Lear stepped inside the cabin and returned with two bottles of sweetened water, one for each cub. Wakinoo first attempted to insert his tongue in the neck of it, and both cubs resorted to a great variety of differing postures in their efforts to get at the contents. Wakinoo solved the problem at last by rearing on his

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hind feet and holding the bottle tilted above his mouth with his forepaws, while Wakinee lay upon his back and awkwardly juggled his own bottle over his face with all four feet.

Wakinoo lived only in the present, making no plans for the future. Manitou had given him appetite in place of foresight, and it was that which regulated his days. It was appetite which led him to feast heavily and put on the solid layers of fat to keep him through the long winter sleep as surely as if he had planned it.

He saw no good reason for leaving this place of safety, food and friendliness and lingered there each day without a plan for the next. He took long, rambling trips through the hills but always returned.

It turned gradually cooler and the nights were sharp with frost; then the cold deepened, but there came sudden thaws between the early storms of fall, and at last settled into the steady, biting cold of early winter.

Wakinoo suffered a loss of appetite, and for no apparent reason he fasted for several days. He was vastly sleepy and spent much time dozing before the cabin. The cold bit into him and led him to seek a more sheltered spot, and he located a windfall jam under the rims back of the cabin and crawled into the heart of it. Wakinee was there before him. The two cubs made one last trip to the cabin before the long sleep gripped them. A heavy storm settled down over the hills during the last week in October and Wakinoo did not come from the den again. It was well into

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April of the following spring before he showed signs of awakening

He tossed restlessly for two days, then broke through the soft spring snowdrift which blocked the passage under the windfall and wandered to the edge of the meadow. His coat was a rich, deep chestnut shade, and he looked much larger than when he had entered the hibernation the previous fall—but he was not. Many pounds of food must be consumed to build up one pound of flesh and bone, and so the theory that a bear grows all through the long sleep is untenable.

Those who belong to the tribe of Wakin take to bed with them a great store of concentrated nourishment in the shape of a solid layer of tallow. This food is turned into milk in the case of the she-bear with cubs, and so furnishes the young with a slight growth. The surplus goes for the growing of hair, the only growth which takes place in the sleeping bear.

All through the winter Wakinoo's fur had been nourished by the lard and had grown long, adding warmth from without as his bodily resistance to cold was lowered from within. It is this which gives the bear a pelt that is prime in the spring when the fur of all others slips, and Wakinoo, with his solid fat transformed into a fine, silky covering, appeared larger than when he denned in his short fall coat.

The cold blast of air which entered the hole through which Wakinoo had left the den was instrumental in arousing Wakinee, and he presently joined his brother in the meadow, his glistening raven pelt contrasting

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sharply with the rich chestnut fur of the cinnamon.

The yearlings were not hungry, as appetite was reasserted but gradually in the spring. Wakinoo might easily have been mistaken for a grazing or browsing animal as he ate nothing but grass and twigs for the first few days after his awakening.

Matt Lear made daily offerings of food, but it was the fourth day before Wakinoo finally decided to vary his diet and accepted a first small piece of meat.

When Enright came again to Matt Lear's cabin he found Wakinoo and Wakinee reclining on the dirt roof of the log house, having mounted it by way of the mighty water spruce which grew at the corner.

The twins increased their range as the summer advanced and were seen less often in the meadow. Wakinoo wandered off by himself in midsummer and from then on each bear went his separate way, returning singly upon their now infrequent visits to the cabin.

Both Matt Lear and Enright chanced across Wakinoo several times in the hills, and, when so seen, the young cinnamon was always traveling for cover at top speed. This mystified Enright but occasioned Matt Lear no least bit of surprise for his knowledge of Wakinoo was large.

Wakinoo dealt in no theoretical things but in proven facts. His rule was simple. He had never once forgotten that those men who wandered through the hills meant death to bears and he avoided them accordingly. He knew the two men as individuals only when he found them at the cabin and so associated

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them in his mind with friendliness. His distinctions were not too fine—rather they were elementary. There were no individuals for him among these roaming men, and he classed them as a dangerous whole, Enright and Matt Lear among them when once out of sight of the house.

Wakinoo did not return to sleep the long sleep in the windfall, but chose another place for denning. The following summer he came to the cabin but twice, and the next year not at all.

Each new experience with man deepened his belief that all men were treacherous. He had been shot at many times and twice had felt the hurt of rifle balls. He had come to know that friendliness was not the keynote of his relations with man—the reverse in fact; and yet in the face of this persecution he felt a strong urge to visit Matt Lear's cabin whenever his wanderings led him through the Shoshone bottoms. He frequently veered to the timber edge and looked at it across the meadow, and he often visited it at night. Matt Lear always found his dust tracks before the door in the morning and understood only too well.

And while all other men sought Wakinoo's life Matt Lear was making a fight to save it. The game of the low country was gone and the animals of the hills were growing fewer. Matt Lear and those men who came to hunt with him were persistently urging the necessity of limited bags and their efforts had met some measure of success. The antlered tribes had been saved from all-year hunting and could now only be killed in certain

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months. But all efforts to save the tribe of Wakin had failed.

The minds of men were too thoroughly steeped in the malicious legend of his savagery. They hunted him in the fall when his coat was short, in the early summer when his pelt was rubbed and later when he was shedding, and so of no value at all. They trapped for him at all seasons, and those who would never be found guilty of killing a fawn or the young of other animals shot down black and cinnamon cubs and exulted in the belief that they had slain a dangerous beast. In a struggle of knowledge and fact against ignorance and deep-rooted superstition, the latter two are always the stronger in the beginning, and so Matt Lear's fight was an uphill fight and Wakinoos was finding it hard to survive.

He grew wise in the ways of men and brought all his keen senses into play in avoiding them. A bear who survives his first few meetings with man is a hard bear to hunt, and Wakinoos was of that class. Whenever one sense apprised him of the proximity of man he did not wait for his other senses to coördinate and so make sure. The bare suspicion was enough to send him off, and invariably his first move in the game was to put some bit of cover between his line of flight and the source of menace. Once started, he sternly repressed curiosity and appetite until he had traveled a greater distance than any man would be apt to cover in one day.

His trail often crossed Wakinee's, and they fre-

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quently wandered together for several days at a time. It was upon one of these occasions that man disclosed his hand in a way new to them—sprung one more method of taking the life of bears. It was shedding season, that time of year when a bear's pelt is worthless. The hair hung in matted patches, the flanks showed rubbed spots, and the fur was lusterless and faded.

The two brothers were exploring rotten logs on a down-timbered hillside when the clamor of a dog pack was suddenly raised a bare half mile up the slope. Wakinoo did not associate this sound with men—did not even realize he was the object of it until a horde of fighting hounds and Airedales poured through the trees. He turned away from this disagreeable commotion, but had covered less than a hundred yards before a swift running Airedale seized one hind leg.

Wakinoo was suddenly surrounded by seven dogs, four of them spread out fanwise before him, their fangs bared horribly, while the remaining three fell on him from behind. He whirled and fought, charging in short rushes and striking at his tormentors. In the main his blows were futile before the nimbleness of the dogs.

The pack worked in unison and with definite intent. Through all the turmoil two great hounds worked tirelessly for one hold. Time and again they bored in swiftly at a sharp tangent from the rear and lunged simultaneously from both flanks to seize a hold on Wakinoo's ears, while others struck at each of his four feet. It was well for Wakinoo that all these holds were

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not secured at once. With an eighty-pound dog clamped on each ear and foot the pack would have had him pinned down and stretched.

Wakinoos could hear another fight off through the timber to the right. The pack had split and his black brother was hard pressed. The conflict raged down the slope on a course parallel to his own. Wakinoos mounted a tree and the music of the dogs changed to a steady bay. Three hundred yards away the dogs who besieged Wakinee were also barking about a tree.

The men who had loosed the hounds understood the different note, knew that their quarry was bayed, and increased their speed.

Wakinoos heard them through all the uproar of the dogs and knew then that this was the work of man. He did not wait. Rather than meet men he found courage to face the dogs. The frenzied pack leaped up to meet him as he slid down the tree, and bear and dogs fell in a fighting mass at the foot of it.

Wakinee had reached a similar decision, and both fights moved off in the same direction. Both bears, as if by common impulse, started toward the one doubtful refuge which might serve them in this extremity and headed straight for Matt Lear's cabin.

Matt Lear and Enright listened to the progress of two running fights. Then a big black bear followed by five savage dogs plunged from the timber almost at the same instant that a cinnamon broke cover two hundred yards beyond.

Both bears ran straight for the house. Wakinee

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having a shorter distance and fewer foes, was the first to reach the water spruce and gain the dirt roof by way of it.

The dogs surged back across the meadow to join in the new fight, and the whole of them, encouraged by the added numbers of a reunited pack, swarmed all over the big cinnamon in one final effort to stretch him out.

Wakinoo pinned a big hound underneath and mauled him. An Airedale felt the full weight and claws of a smashing forepaw across his hips, and a third dog was knocked ten feet by a sweeping blow that broke his shoulder.

Wakinoo shook them off and gained half his distance before they closed with him again. He reached the tree with another rush, and twice the dogs pulled him back. He fought them with his back to the tree, then whirled and made a third attempt to scale it. An Airedale fastened on his rump and swung there until his hold was broken by Wakinoo's final heave which carried him to the roof.

Two horsemen spurred into the meadow and were greeted by the sight of a black bear and a cinnamon pacing back and forth across the dirt roof of a lonely cabin, safe from the pack that raged below, while two men stood before the door and watched.

The owner of the pack was justly proud of his dogs. He was a thorough sportsman according to his lights. It was only in knowledge that he lacked, honestly believing, as he did, that bears were highly dangerous to men, and so fair prey to be shot down on sight even

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at this season of worthless fur. His mind leaped to the only possible solution of the scene before him, that the owner of this lonely cabin was also the owner of two tame bears.

The owner of the bears had not shot the dogs, even to save his pets, and it was unthinkable that the owner of the dogs should now wish to kill the bears.

He dropped from his horse and extended his hand.

"I'm sorry," he said simply.

Matt Lear smiled as he accepted both the hand and the apology, making no explanation as to the ownership of the bears.

There was no least trace of an off-color streak in any one of the men or beasts who were grouped around the house. The dogs were good dogs—game to the last pulse beat; there was nothing mean in either of the bears, and there was a sound heart in each of the four men gathered there. It was only the system—the system based on vicious legend—that was wrong.

It was not until the following morning that the twin bears ventured down the tree and made off for the timber. Matt Lear and Enright watched them go.

"Two wise bears," Matt Lear said. "The tribe of Wakin is a smart tribe. One lesson of each kind answers for all time with them. Wakinoo and Wakinee have learned of one tree which is safe. Nothing but a silent running pack could ever bring either of them to tree in any other but that one. You will see."

There were many men who came to Matt Lear's

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cabin on the Shoshone through the following years, and it was given to perhaps one in every ten of them to witness a very strange thing.

Either a huge cinnamon or an equally large black bear would suddenly break cover at the timber edge and run straight for the water spruce that grew at the corner of the house. It might be only minutes or it might be hours, but always the other would come, sometimes showing evidence of a long, hard trip, running but with a single aim in life—to reach the safety tree. As they paced restlessly back and forth across the dirt roof they seemed always listening.

And Matt Lear knew that somewhere off in the distance a dog pack was running a trail in the hills.

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ADMITTED that we're a shade removed from savagery," said the explorer,—"and still farther from the beasts. I'm not arguing that. We've improved and amplified the system of barter and exchange. We cut a man's throat financially instead of knocking him on the head and appropriating his wealth. But the underlying impulse emanates from the same sources: love of mate and young, love of finery and display. Gouge the other fellow to provide for your own; Even gorillas travel in family groups. Well, I'm off."

Anderson, the raw-fur buyer leaned against a display case and gazed after him.

"Carpenter has prowled into odd places so often and lived among savages so much that he's inclined to be one himself," he remarked.

The furrier leaned over the case and tapped it, looking earnestly at the raw-fur buyer.

"I've often thought the same of you," he smiled. "You've put in so much time among crude people that you're growing to believe in their primitive way of

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administering justice. It's easier to revert to the raw than to attain the opposite."

"Same to you, Flick!" Anderson retorted. "Carpenter is half right. You buy from me because you can purchase cheaper than at the auctions. I sell to you to get the best prices I can. You gouge me whenever you see the chance. I hold you up at every opportunity. Same reason—to provide for our own. We both cut out the middle-man and damn him for trying to do the same."

A woman rustled back through the shop and spread a silver fox pelt on the case.

"I want that matched, Mr. Flick," she said. "You remember I bought it a year ago because Arline admired it so. She doesn't know I have it, of course. I want a mate for it."

"How soon, Mrs. Carlton?" he asked. "It's a rather difficult pelt to match. There are forty shades of silver foxes, you know."

"Any time in two years," the woman said. "I want the set as a surprise for her eighteenth birthday."

"I can make it cheaper that way," the furrier stated. "I'll be sure to run across one in that time without going to the expense of hunting down a single pelt—which would be the case if you wished to match it at once. Twelve hundred dollars will cover it, I think."

Mrs. Carlton twisted her pretty mouth into a fetching pout.

"It's a frightful price to pay to some Northern savage who won't know how to enjoy the sum after he

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gets it. Why do they rob us so? Well, I simply must have it for Arline."

Anderson examined the skin minutely after the woman had departed. The forward half of the pelt was glossy black, the hackle fur heavy and unmarked by a single white hair. Just behind the shoulders a very few silver-tipped guard hairs peeped through, increasing in numbers toward the open end of the cased hide till the rear third was liberally sprinkled and showed a lustrous silver against a blue-black field. The tail was five inches through and two-thirds as long as the pelt, black throughout its length, except for the pure white tip. Anderson picked it up and shook it head down, and the long fur rippled back while he blew into the underfur to part it and estimate its length and thickness.

A thousand miles away a savage blast of wind swept a bald ridge near timber line and struck through the underfur of a pelt that was a perfect mate for the one Anderson had examined, a pelt worn by a living animal; and Wawina, the silver-black fox, scudded over to the sheltered side of the hogback, for no fox relishes a strong wind at his back that drives through his fur and whips his heavy brush. Once over the ridge he stopped, one forefoot uplifted, the sharp ears pricked forward and the keen pointed nose testing the wind. The deep orange eyes peered from the black face with a contrast of colors even more startling than the effect of the snow-white tip that set off the magnificent black tail.

Wawina was all savage at that instant, for the meat-scent had reached his nostrils. He crossed back over

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the ridge, quartering into the wind. The scent came strong, and he traced it to the body of a mountain sheep that lay in the heavy timber on the slope. A cougar had dragged his kill to this sheltered spot and gorged, leaving the rest behind for the smaller meat-eaters of the hills.

The black fox stopped and sampled the wind for messages of the recent presence of other banqueters. The surface of the packed drifts showed many signs, and Wawina's nose informed him that some, at least, were fresh. Dusk was falling as he trotted to the sheep. Two gray jays squawked harshly and hopped to the lower branches of a spruce, from which point of vantage they viewed the intruder, uttering their monotonous "A-a-a-agh" at twenty-second intervals, first with a rising inflection as if putting an interrogation, then, after seeming to ponder the matter, giving vent to the same note with a falling inflection as if in answer to their own inquiry.

Wawina's nose informed him that two coyotes had fed there during the day, a lynx the night before; the rest of the signs were cold. The two jays, realizing no doubt that the fox had come to stay, rose above the trees and winged their way down the slope. The black fox moved back to the ridge and stationed himself on a high point, every sense alert. After perhaps five minutes, satisfied that all was well, he stretched forth his head, cupped his lips and sent forth a wild squall.

From far down the spruce-slope came an answering cry, the squall rising to a high note, then falling rapidly: "Wa-augh—ha-aw!" Wawina trotted back to the

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remains of the bighorn ram and feasted. With the coming of night a gripping cold had shut down over the hills, congealing the surface of the drifts that had thawed and softened during the day under the warm, spring sun. The black fox raised his head as a shadowy form crossed over the ridge and slipped silently toward him under the trees. Wameechin, the red she-fox, came to the feed.

Two hours later she turned suddenly and moved off. Wawina followed, but she paid no heed to him, holding steadily on her way through heavy timber and across bald ridges until she came at last to an open shoulder of a hill. It was free of trees, clad with heavy sage and had a south exposure. The drifts had disappeared in this opening. Wameechin entered a clump of sage on the side hill and failed to come out on the opposite side.

Wawina started down the mouth of the hole in the center of the sage thicket, but a snarl warned him back. He tried another entrance fifteen feet beyond, but with the same result. He gave over the effort and retraced his way.

When he reached the sheep again, he started to tear a piece to take home. Wawina was a good mate. If Wameechin could not rustle for herself, he would feed her. The chunk of hide and meat was almost severed when the black fox saw a grey beast moving to the feed, and he departed until the lynx should leave.

Dawn was lifting the shadows as Wawina gained the ridge. He bedded on a rocky point that overlooked the feeding-place. A second beast joined the lynx at

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the meat, a bobcat whose fur showed spotted in the early morning light. The two worked at opposite extremities of the sheep, each endeavoring to tear off a piece that could be carried away. Wawina could hear the snarls as they lifted their heads to glare malevolently across the feed. The lynx had three kits in a windfall jam down the slope; the spotted cat had two young of her own in a crevice in a rock-slide a mile away.

Wawina despised the cats, the stupid beasts that would walk into an uncovered trap, whose males left their shes to raise the kits alone, even killed their own young whenever possible. The she-cats were good mothers—the one redeeming quality of the cat tribe.

The bobcat succeeded in tearing off a goodly chunk, and the big lynx leaped for her. The spotted cat dropped the meat and whisked down the slope. The mother lynx picked up the plunder and departed, and after she had gone, the bobcat returned and worked at the partially severed piece deserted by the other. By the time the first rays of the sun had driven the chill from the hills, she too had left the spot, a juicy fragment dangling from her jaws.

The meat-eating birds rallied to the feed, ravens and magpies, along with two big gray Clark's crows. One of the crows worked patiently to detach a shred of meat, uttering harsh squawks of resentment whenever disturbed by one of the larger ravens. Her efforts were crowned with success at last, but a raven pounced on the severed scrap and wrested it from her, flapped up through the trees and set sail for her nest on a distant

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cliff-face. The gray crow robbed a magpie of a similar morsel and winged away to feed her own hungry brood.

Wawina was averse to daylight foraging, but the thought of Wameechin's need spurred him on, and he dropped down to the sheep. He sliced deeply into one haunch, tugging and twisting to tear part of it away. He was nervous and alert, frequently raising his head and trotting a few paces into the wind to reassure himself. A last wrench severed the coveted piece of meat and he moved off with it toward the den. When half-way home, he saw a movement among the trees ahead and crouched flat behind a down-log.

A dog coyote passed fifty yards below him, the one creature whose wisdom was superior to his own. Wawina feared and respected him accordingly. He remained motionless until long after the coyote had passed from view, then resumed his way, the orange eyes sweeping both flanks of his route. Twice he dropped the meat and elevated his muzzle to test the wind. The coyote hunted in the light of day with almost the same freedom as at night and Wawina dreaded his yellow cousin, for in the past he had been furnished with abundant proof of the coyote's resourcefulness. He cast an apprehensive glance over his shoulder—and the next second he was in full flight, for he had seen the yellow wolf quartering down upon him from behind.

The coyote dashed after him and gained. Wawina dropped the meat, and the coyote picked up the spoils, heading at once toward his own mate and pups.

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The whole scheme was one of savagery throughout, each succeeding plunderer actuated by the same impulse, the urge to provide for his own.

Wawina was a princely mate. In all the wild there were but two, the coyote and the wolf, who were his equals in this respect. He was only temporarily disheartened by the loss of his meat, and within a few hundred yards he was hunting for more. If he had been a fox of the far North he would have ranged the rolling timberlands and the barrens; if he had been born in the East, his hunting-ground would have been in the hardwood hills. Here in the backbone of the Western ranges, his tribe had taken to the peaks, the altitude affording the same low temperature as the lowlands farther north.

The black fox hunted the spruce-slopes, creeping through blow downs and burnings, working against the wind into sidehill parks or out across the broad meadows above timber line. Small game was scarce, and for two hours he foraged without success. Then he came to the edge of a burning so ancient as to have been transformed by time into an open park. It caught the full sweep of the sun, and the drifts had melted off. The grassy slope was dotted with clumps of shrubs and wild rose bushes that sprouted in profusion round the few charred logs left to mark the fire.

A pair of blue grouse stalked at the edge of a shrub thicket and reached up to tear off the swelling buds. Wawina worked downwind from them and advanced behind the cover of the shrubs, the delicious fragrance

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of the birds playing on his nostrils. He crouched flat and stealthily circled the thicket to a point where a single low shrub would afford cover from which to make a spring.

The fox can strike with unbelievable speed, and once within ten feet of an unsuspecting grouse, the bird is his. In all the hills there is perhaps but one four-footed killer whose strike is more lightning-like than that of the fox—a creature of stupid ferocity, one that when molested, attacks larger creatures with the blind rage of a tormented rattler, regardless of the certain consequences attendant upon his recklessness. One of this tribe too was on the meat-trail, intent upon supplying her four bloodthirsty young with meat. Wawina had flattened behind his screening shrub and tensed his muscles for a spring when there was a flash of yellow from the heart of the thicket.

A snakelike destroyer fastened on the neck of the hen grouse. The cock was off with a roar of wings while his mate drummed the ground in her death-struggles, the feathers fanned from the spot in whirling puffs. Wawina sprang—and so quick was the killer that she loosed her hold and darted away while the fox was still in mid-air; the she-weasel landed six feet from the grouse as the black fox struck it. Her body was ten inches long and little more than an inch in thickness. The mouth also was snakelike, seeming to split the head clear to the ears, and opened to such an extent that the fang-fringed red mask was of greater diameter than the body.

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A single spring carried her back to Wawina, and the gaping mouth clicked shut as she connected with his throat. The long body flashed round his neck, almost concealed in the long fur where his teeth could not reach her, while her own fangs worked at his throat. Wawina snapped from side to side, but his teeth clashed on empty air. He shook himself savagely without loosening her hold the fraction of an inch, rolled over and over without avail, then dug both forepaws along the sides of his neck and tore the bloodsucker from him, one paw pinning her fast.

The weasel's teeth left Wawina's throat and fastened on the foot between the tender toes with a slash that forced him to jerk it back, and she flipped away as his teeth snapped shut on the space her body had occupied a split-second before. Even as he raised his head, she was back, flashing at his throat. His jaws closed on her, but as he shut down and crushed her midway of the body, she writhed round and scored his face and nose with her teeth until a last wrench and shake threw her twenty feet, a lifeless heap.

The black fox reached her in two bounds and mauled her, then licked his wounded toes and circled his long tongue over his lacerated face. He picked up the grouse and the weasel, but first one or the other slipped from his jaws. At last he abandoned the idea of carrying the double burden and deposited the grouse on the ground while he buried the weasel at the end of a log and tamped the soft earth over it with his nose. He picked up the grouse and started for the den, holding to

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the heavy drifts under the matted spruce on the slopes and avoiding openings wherever feasible.

He came at last to a broad meadow which he must cross, and he stopped and tore off the head of the grouse, crunched it a few times to soften the skull and swallowed it feathers, bill and all, his eyes sweeping the open ground during the operation. Assured that it was safe he started across.

A man who knelt within the timber farther down the opposite side suddenly dropped the traps he was caching under a log and trained his rifle on the fox. He shook his head and lowered it again. Wawina's pelt showed rubbed spots on the flanks. McCloud knew it would prove a blue pelt at best and in all likelihood a shedder. Wawina reached the timber without knowing that death had hovered over him and passed him by.

McCloud went on his way, caching his traps where he could find them the following fall. Two hours later he entered a one-room log cabin and greeted the woman and two little girls that made his life worth living.

"The black fox still lives," he said. "Neither Campbell nor the Breed has pinched his toes. I saw him to-day, carrying a grouse, which means that his mate is denned this spring within my territory. Come fall, and I'll stretch his pelt and you'll have the trinkets you've been longing for."

There came a knock at the door; Anderson, the raw-fur buyer, had arrived to bargain for the winter's catch. McCloud told him of the black fox, and the woman brought out a well-thumbed catalogue and showed the

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buyer the treasures that would be gained with the price of the silver pelt; bright hair-ribbons and strings of glass beads for the little girls—red calico dresses for the one and robin's egg blue for the other; six plates and bowls of flowered porcelain for the table; a plaid shawl for herself, and a new fiddle for McCloud. As the list grew, the fur buyer wondered what it would benefit these people, buried deep in the wilderness, to come into possession of all this. He smiled at the earnest assurance that McCloud would strip off the silver's pelt in the fall.

He had that day heard two similar assurances. The country was closely trapped, three lines thrown out over one district that could be covered by a single energetic trapper. Four hours ago he had been over on Paint Creek with Campbell, the favored suitor of Lucille, the daughter of the old Frenchman Jules Theseau who lived twenty miles to the east. Campbell had confided that they would be wed as soon as he should take the black fox pelt and so be in a position to shower his beloved with the baubles which were her due. A few hours prior to that Incham, the breed, had scowlingly predicted that he himself would pinch Wawina's toes and that the coveted Lucille would turn her favor upon the man who came into such sudden affluence.

"Savages!" Anderson reflected. "Still thinking in terms of glass beads and gaudy cloth. Trinkets for their mates and young! Good sort at that—but simple."

Meanwhile, far back in the hills Wawina had reached

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the mouth of the den with an offering for his own mate and young, for during the early morning hours Wameechin had given birth to six tiny mites of life. Wawina started down the hole with the grouse, but his mate warned him off, set her teeth in the grouse and wrenched it away from him, backing with it down the long entrance to the nest.

Wawina did not see his offspring for four days. He darted down the hole while his rufous mate sunned herself on the slope. The six tiny creatures gave no indication of what they would later become. They were of the size of chipmunks, the tails short and fuzzy, large where they joined the body and slanting abruptly down to a point. There was no indication of their parents' long, slender noses; instead their heads were chunky and blunt. Their very short legs would not support them, and they crawled blindly about the nest with plaintive, mouselike squeaks. Nor in their fur did they give any promise of future coloring, the quarter-inch fuzz that covered them being a uniform slatish black. Wawina did not linger but sought the open air, thinking no doubt that Wameechin had sadly tricked him.

His red mate left the foraging to him, and for a space of two weeks she did not stray far from the den. Wawina hunted tirelessly. Grouse and rabbits, scores of mice and chipmunks, were carried to the den. Often he brought birds, once a groundhog; and twice he appeared with snakes. The surplus he buried in the soft earth at the roots of the sage. A fox who is a

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father is prey to constant fear that his mate and pups will at some time in the future run short of food, and of all animals he is the only one that will deny himself even in time of plenty.

Wawina was no exception to this rule. Whenever he brought meat to the den, he ate a portion of it, but always he was overcome by that fear of future shortage as soon as the wire edge of his hunger was gone. He never gorged, ate barely enough to sustain him, perhaps less than half his usual rations, and cached the rest against a day of famine. It was notable that he brought home no ravens, crows or magpies. Except at the point of starvation a fox refuses to touch the flesh of one of these carrion-eaters.

The glossy black pelt by now had turned rusty and lost its luster, the fur hanging in matted patches. The tail was scrawny and thinly furred. Wawina had now become a sorry spectacle, and Wameechin's red pelt was no less ragged and disreputable.

When the cubs were four weeks old, the dog fox saw his offspring in the open for the first time. The little red vixen gave a low squall, and the six pups toddled from the mouth of the den. They were fat and round and awkward, waddling on their short legs as they scampered about on the side-hill. A few guard-hairs had pushed through the soft fuzz that covered them. Three were still dark and showed no trace of color, but the other three had acquired a queer yellow tint from the scattered guard-hairs, the dark underfur showing through.

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The nondescript litter developed rapidly after their first trip to the open air, and by their seventh week the old dog could discern a likeness to the fox tribe where formerly his nose was the only means of identifying them as belonging to his kind. The legs had grown long and slender; the blunt noses had lengthened and grown sharp, the tails had furred out. Three of the pups were still very dark. One of these showed brownish patches on the sides just back of the shoulders. The three lighter ones had turned a soft reddish hue as more and more guard-hairs crowded through.

Wawina was very fond of his brood, and he romped and played with them near the mouth of the den. All through this playfulness, however, there was mixed a thread of useful training for the future. When he returned to the den with meat, they swarmed from the hole and tore it from his jaws. At times he ran with it, and they dashed after him. The first to seize it was forced to fight to retain his proprietorship, and the combats were strenuous and real. There were few feeding times when each young fox failed to feel the punishing teeth of the others. All trace of awkwardness had vanished, and the little pirates flashed always for the largest remaining scrap of the prey. In the end it was invariably torn to shreds, and each received his share. The one who was last to consume his portion was forced to swallow it on the run or not at all, for the rest never failed to give chase and hound him through the sage until the last morsel had disappeared.

There was meat in plenty, for the vixen was now free

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to help her mate on the hunt. With the necessities of life supplied, Wawina turned his attention to other things. The minds of human parents, once their offspring are supplied with food, often turn to providing them with trinkets, toys and finery; and so it was with the black fox. On one of his hunts he sighted a white object half-buried in the pine-straw under the trees and turned it over with his paw. It proved to be the bleached skull of a small bear. Wawina trotted away from it, then turned back and viewed it from all sides. He picked it up and headed back for the den. The fox pups were thus treated to their first toy.

The mother fox, too, was now intent upon supplying amusements for her unruly family and brought home the whitened rib of an elk. Wawina next appeared with a large strip of deer-hide, toughened and weather-cured. Day by day the accumulation of toys increased. The young foxes were possessed of the same selfish cupidity that stamps the young of the human race. Whenever one of them elected to play with a certain trinket, the other toys were temporarily neglected as the whole brood rushed him and sought to gain possession of that particular one.

The system of communication between the members of the family was perfect, notwithstanding their limited vocabulary. The mother's various notes of command were so similar as to seem identical to the human ear, but the pups read the inflections unerringly. At one note they would file out of the den and rush to meet her; at another they darted for the safety of the hole.

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So it happened that when she summoned them forth one night at dusk and started for the timber, they followed as readily as if this was their twentieth trip abroad instead of but the first.

The old dog and the vixen led the way, the pups following close behind. They hunted through the heavy timber, scouting through windfall jams and skirting sidehill seeps in search of prey. The pups emulated the parents in all things, aping their every act. When Wawina paused to test the wind, the pups stretched forth their muzzles and sniffed. Wawina left the timber and followed a bald ridge, dropped down another forested slope and came out in a grassy meadow. The dry grass of the previous year had been mashed flat by the winter snows, and the green grass had pushed through this matted carpet of the dead. All through this tangle the mice had made little runways and tunnels.

The dog fox paused when a few yards outside the fringe of trees, sniffing eagerly. The pups caught an odor that was suggestive of meat. Wawina took a few steps into the wind, then leaped and pressed his forepaws firmly down on the springy carpet of flattened grass, shoved his nose between his paws and snapped. He lifted his head with a tuft of dead grass in his jaws. As he dropped it and shook the stiff particles of hay from his mouth, the pups sprang forward to learn the cause of it all. A warm, dead mouse was the result of the old dog's act. Two pups tore the prey apart, and each

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gulped his half after a preliminary crunch to crush the bones.

They scattered eagerly over the meadow in search of more. Every pup made frequent mistakes and pounced on some spot from which the scent came warm, only to find that it was but a runway over which a mouse had recently passed. They soon learned to distinguish the trail scent from the body scent, and after three hours of unceasing effort, each pup had succeeded in catching at least one mouse.

The vixen raised her head at a distant yelp and started for the timber as it was answered from a near-by ridge. The coyote family was on the hunt, and from past experience she knew that while these yellow marauders made no special effort to seek out foxes in times of plenty, they would be only too apt to pounce upon her family if they came across them unexpectedly.

The first hunt was ended, and Wameechin headed back for the den. As the little family passed through a black jungle of spruce and down timber, the rearmost pup raised a squall of fright and agony. Without a sound to warn him, he had felt the deadly grip of frightful talons striking through his loins, a vicious snap of a heavy beak above his ears, then a crushing blow on his skull.

The mother fox whirled and leaped at the sound. At a single spring she reached the big gray owl, and her teeth closed midway of the slender body encased in the fluffy mass of feathers. The owl reached for her face

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with his powerful claws but her grip was too close to the junction of legs and body; the murderous hooks clutched only the empty air but the savage beak closed on Wameechin's neck at the base of the ear and cut clear to the skull. Then the head fell back limply, and the red vixen shook the winged killer till the feathers flew.

She licked the wounds of the bleeding pup. He followed on with drooping head, giving vent to plaintive snarls as the pain twitched at his back, for the talons had nearly finished him at a single strike.

The wounded pup was very weak for several days, but his strength gradually returned. Each night the fox family heard the oft-repeated calls of the she-owl, summoning the mate who never came, the notes now soft and plaintive, now hoarse and gruff. The hen owl was left alone to forage for the three young miscreants in a hollow stump, the three fluffy bits in whose behalf the male had unwisely sought to slay the fox pup. For the big owls, too, are devoted lovers, mating for life or until one of a pair is killed; and they are lovers of home, and returning to the same den site each year, the male helping to provide for his young.

The ragged fur of the older foxes had been rubbed off in their travels though the brush, the new coats of short hair causing the bodies to appear much thinner than when full-furred. The guard hairs of the cubs' pelts had at last pushed through the dark underfur in such numbers as to indicate their coloring at maturity. The three lighter ones had turned reddish and gave promise of being exact duplicates of their mother. One

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was blue-black with silver-tipped guard hairs on rump and well along the back, a second Wawina. Another showed such profusion of these silver hairs as to appear slightly more gray than black where viewed in certain lights; the third dark member of the family was far more gray than black, even his face was sprinkled with short silver hairs, a brownish patch appearing on each side behind the break of the shoulder. His pelt would rate as a high-grade cross or a rusty silver. This difference of color occasioned no surprise in the parents, for the many grades of cross foxes and the numerous shades of wonderful silvers are only freak color phases of the red fox.

Wawina led his family out and taught them the ways of the world. They learned how to stalk rabbits and grouse. They were taught to read the scents and sounds until they could distinguish between the jarring walk of hoofed game and the shuffling progress of the bear or the soft, padding footfalls of the cats; the yelping barks of the cow elk from the cry of the loon on the mountain lakes; they grew accustomed to the coughing grunts of the moose that wallowed in the beaver swamps. Scents were even more readily interpreted than sounds, and they were taught to know the trail scent of animals that it was well to avoid, and those that would constitute their prey.

Wawina's taste in food was, next to the bear's, the most varied of that of any animal in the range, and the two old foxes led the pups to a surprising variety of delicacies. As the summer advanced, they fed on a

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dozen different berries and wild fruits, the seed-pods of the wild rose, crisp grasses and the tender buds of shrubs. Along the streams they found scraps of fish left behind by mink, or an occasional trout that had leaped out upon a rock-bar and was unable to return to his element. The cool nights chilled the grasshoppers and beetles, and the young foxes hunted these sluggish ones in the deep grass where there was warmth.

The cool days of early fall brought a change over the face of the hills. The aspen, birch and alder patches turned under the bite of frosts to variegated splotches showing through the green of the spruce, and with it a change came over Wawina. For long months he had denied himself, eating barely enough to sustain him even when there was food in plenty, urged to conserve every scrap lest there should come a time of famine for his pups. Now one day when Wawina pounced on a grouse and killed it, and the pups raced joyfully for the spot, the black fox snarled and warned them off. The first to reach him sprang for the still fluttering bird, but Wawina wheeled away from him. The pup persisted, and the old dog dropped the bird and thrashed his insistent offspring. One after another felt his punishing teeth. The largest dog pup in the litter turned on his father and fought for the possession of the bird. Wawina bore him down and mauled him until the warring pup was battered and well-behaved.

And meantime:

A thousand miles away Flick the furrier stood with his hand on the shoulder of his son.

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"I've educated you," he said. "I've taught you as much of the world as I can. It is time for you to put those teachings to a practical test on your own initiative. It's the only way."

And as the young man went forth from his father's establishment to face the world on his own, so Wawina Second, the black fox pup, left the family group and ran far off through the hills to rustle for himself.

The rest of the pups sat in a circle sometimes rising and padding restlessly round the moonlit park as they watched their strange parent eating his grouse alone and refusing to share even a scrap with them. From that day on they were forced to rustle for themselves. Wawina feasted to repletion every night and occasionally robbed one of the pups of some bit of food. Wameechin was not so aggressive, but her attitude otherwise was much the same. And with the cool weather and the better feed, the fur of the old foxes grew long and thick and silky.

The family circle was now broken up, the pups hunting alone, frequently meeting in their wanderings and often traveling for hours with their parents. A change had also come into the relations of the old pair. They quarreled when Wameechin sought to follow her usual custom of depriving her mate of his food whenever so inclined. At times he resented this tyranny and defended his rights; there was much commotion during the resulting clashes.

The first time this occurred after the departure of the pups, he snarled angrily when Wameechin darted in to

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take the young cottontail he had just killed. They reared on their hind legs, the forefeet of each contestant planted against the other's chest, ears laid flat, tails curled tightly sidewise, and mouths open with a savage display of fangs. Short, explosive snarls alternated with wild squalls of rage, but through it all there was not a single blow—a wordy, irritable dispute without physical violence. Wawina would not use his teeth against his mate as he had against the pups.

They hunted separate ridges, keeping the same general direction, traveling together at times, though more frequently apart, but always within range of easy communication, each aware of the other's actions, determined by scent or sound, and when either made a good kill, the other was summoned to the spot.

The snows fell early and deep that winter. The bears sought their dens, and the elk and deer migrated to the lower feed; beavers had piled the heavy green sections of aspen trunks on the bottoms of their ponds for winter food and were seldom abroad; squirrels and chipmunks came out only on the warmest days, subsisting meanwhile on pine-cone caches, winter stocks previously stored away; the mountain woodchucks had holed up till spring. There were only the moose wintering in the swamps of the high country, and the bighorn bands on the peaks—and the smaller killers who left their tracks on the white surface of the snow in their never-ending hunt for meat.

And there were three trap-lines thrown out through

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the hills, the three territories roughly divided by certain ridges or streams.

Wawina first learned of this when he caught the scent of dead grouse on a heavily timbered flat and traced it to the source. He stopped twenty yards away and viewed a curious bark shelter built against the foot of a tree to keep the snow from the trap-set. Within the opening he could see the grouse, the floor of the tiny hut covered deep with feathers, and he knew that a trap was bedded in this downy mass. There were great prints in the snow—web-tracks of the trapper, although the man-scent had been frozen out. Wawina was aware that the season of dread was once more in full swing—the time of partial famine for the fur bearers, the hills studded with tempting baits and deadly traps.

Later in the day he caught the scent of dead squirrel. He found it spiked to the trunk of a huge spruce tree six feet above the surface of the snow. A slanting chunk of log six inches through leaned against the tree, its flat top affording an easy resting place a few inches below the squirrel; a natural lane for the climbing marten, his favorite food to be secured by simply running up the log—and stepping on the trap that was planted on the flat end under the bait.

The black fox crossed over a dividing ridge, Wameechin following his trail as soon as she discovered his absence. This carried him out of McCloud's territory and into the country trapped by Incham, the breed, only to find more traps. The beaver ponds had

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not yet frozen entirely over, the open water showing dark and sullen from the snow-covered shores. Here the breed had bedded his beaver-traps under six inches of water where the furred colonists were in the habit of climbing out upon the banks.

Wawina traveled on and ranged into Campbell's territory. He found the man's cat-traps in the brushy bottoms, little pens built of logs to guide the stupid bobcats over the single lane leading to the traps. Rabbit-skins and bird-wings were suspended to near-by limbs, fluttering strangely in the wind—these to attract the attention of the beasts, whose noses were not keen enough to detect cold meat. A cat would pass within ten feet down wind from a bait that Wawina could scent for a hundred yards. But these fluttering things would catch his eye, and once bent upon investigation, he would enter the little runway and step on the uncovered trap others would not approach.

The two foxes found no great difficulty in foraging live prey for the first two months, but small game grew harder to find as winter tightened down. Wawina looked more longingly at the tempting lures spread out through the hills, but every few days he found a cat or lynx fast in some trap, or a marten dangling from a tree at the end of a chain; some animals he saw swinging high in the air, suspended from the tips of saplings that had been bent over and pegged down, fastened to the trap-chain in such fashion that the first tug of a trapped fur-bearer would release the spring-pole and

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swing him aloft. These things held him back from touching any of the baits.

Out on the ridges he found more cunning sets made for his own kind or for such of the coyote tribe that ranged so high in the hills. Here the meat was staked firmly down, and the traps, bedded below the surface of the ground where the snow was blown off, were so identical in appearance with the rest of the surroundings that it was impossible to determine the site of any one of the several scattered round each bait. This caution was necessary to trick the clever coyotes who sometimes followed the fox ridges. Wawina saw one cross fox and three reds in these traps, and twice he passed coyotes fighting desperately and without pause to break the thing that gripped them.

Wameechin's mating time came early and her pups would be born some time in February almost a month earlier than in the previous spring. The marital quarrels had ceased, and Wawina was once more the devoted lover that gave up every bit of food that his waspish mate desired to sample. It required continual hunting to rustle even a slender living. The cougars had followed the antlered game to the low country, and there were no wasted kills for the smaller meat-eaters.

The coyotes that still clung to the ridges systematically robbed the trap-lines. The little bark huts with their ill-concealed traps were simple problems for a hungry coyote to solve. The buried ridge-sets were more difficult, and occasionally one miscalculated and

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paid the penalty of his rashness. Wawina had not the resourcefulness of his yellow relatives. He knew only that trap-sets were dangerous in the extreme and he avoided them, lacking the coyote's power of estimating the danger and cold nerve to overcome it and steal the bait.

Frost still gripped the hills; there was small chance to excavate another den in earth frozen almost to bedrock, and so Wameechin returned to the one of the year before.

A mile from the den-site a lynx had an early litter in the heart of a windfall jam, and she too was in dire straits. Twice she came to the fox den and sought to squeeze into the hole that was too small for her. Finding this impossible, she reached a paw far down the tunnel, feeling about with distended claws. On her first visit she found Wawina at home, and every time she flattened on the ground to reach into the den, the dog fox dashed down upon her from behind with a savage squall, darting away as the lynx whirled to face him. For an hour she persisted in the stupid hope of fishing something forth from the hole, reaching for the pups that were six feet beyond the range of her claws.

Then she wandered back to her kits. On her next trip Wameechin was alone, and as her mate did not seem to be on duty outside, she waged war on the cat from within, driving her teeth into the paw whenever it was stretched down the hole. Again the lynx moved off, and the following day Wawina saw her far from home and traveling steadily. Her paunch was full and

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rounded—the result of a cannibal feast ; being unable to keep her kits alive, she had philosophically devoured them to keep life in herself, and was moving down the country in search of hares and grouse.

The three trap-lines now yielded but little fur, and the season would soon be past—pelts rubbed and unprime, and the traps sprung as soon as the fur began to slip. Campbell trapped hard to make a big catch, inspired by the longing to buy finery for his intended mate. The breed worked to catch more than his rival in the hope that the beautiful and much desired Lucille would turn to him. McCloud followed the trap-line from dawn till dark, trusting that his season's fur-run would exceed the amount required for the necessities of life and permit the purchase of the toys and luxuries his mate and children had longed to possess. One prime silver pelt would bring the catch of any one of the three to the mark desired.

Anderson the fur-buyer was always glad to see a silver pelt in any customer's catch. Each one meant a profit of more than two hundred for himself and furnished that much additional means for his wife and boys. Flick the furrier noted every skin that might prove a match for the pelt for which the mother of Arline Carlton was willing to pay such a goodly price to please her child.

And Wawina followed the meat-trail day after day, urged on by the desperate necessity of Wameechin and the pups. More and more longingly he viewed the tempting baits. Wameechin now always watched for

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his return from the mouth of the den and rushed anxiously to meet him. He crossed over into Campbell's territory and, successfully avoiding the uncovered trap, stole the hare that baited a cat-pen. As he returned with it, he passed a cross fox clamped in a trap on a windswept ridge. The cold had frozen the foot and rendered it feelingless, and the trapped animal was working to amputate the member with his teeth.

An hour later Campbell took him from the trap and tossed the nearly severed foot aside.

Incham, the breed, had taken to spying on the trap-lines of his two rivals. They had noted the tracks of his webs in their respective territories but thus far he had stolen no fur. An hour behind Campbell the breed came to the trap on the ridge and noted the black foot. His brain was fired with rage as he decided that his rival had pinched the foot of Wawina. He paused not to reflect that the foot of a cross fox is as black as that of a silver, but swung away to a ledge that overlooked a meadow through which Campbell would pass on his return trip. As the young Scot came down the meadow, the breed's rifle covered him from above; but as the trapper drew abreast of him, Incham saw that it was only a cross fox that was slung across his back, a pale marten of little value being the only other yield of his line. Thus it was that Campbell went on his way without knowing that if it had been the black fox instead of the cross he would never have reached home.

Two days thereafter Wawina, at the risk of his life,

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robbed another trap and kept his family from starving. He returned to the hunt the next day, but not a single grouse or hare rewarded his persistence. Twice he went to a bald ridge and viewed a chunk of frozen elk-meat that had lain there for a month. This time he drew nearer and circled it. It meant life for his mate and pups if he could but take it home. He moved back to the timber, then returned, irresistibly drawn by the meat scent and the thought of Wameechin's necessity and the plaintive squeaks of the young cubs. All through the night he kept moving back and forth, and just before dawn made a rush for it. He had not the knowledge of trap-robbing that is the portion of the coyote. He reached the meat and tugged at it. It failed to give in that direction; so he shifted to the opposite side, shifted again—and sprang into the air as two steel jaws seized upon his foot. McCloud had thus pinched the toes of the black fox in the very last week of the season. . . .

In the early morning the half-breed trapper, looking from a distant point, saw a black speck bouncing round on the ridge as Wawina fought the trap, and he headed swiftly for the spot, mumbling curses in his eagerness. From the edge of the timber he listened for the crunch of webs that would tell of McCloud's approach, but there was no sound. He crossed into the open.

Wawina made one last despairing effort to break the trap, then turned on the man and snarled, backing to the full length of the chain. His orange eyes glared at the man as the latter raised a heavy club.

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"Hah! The leetle savage—he fights!" the half-breed exclaimed as he swung the club. Wawina met the descending weapon with his open jaws and the weight of it shattered his lower teeth and stunned him. As the light faded, he had one last desperate hope that Wameechin would find meat for herself and pups. The club fell once more.

"Lucille, she will like the money thees hide will breeng," the half-breed exulted; and as he headed swiftly for the timber he had a glowing vision of Lucille established in his cabin and of the many children she would mother for him. Suddenly, then, the fur thief dropped the black fox and threw his rifle to his shoulder, only to let it slip from his fingers as his knees sagged under him at the roar of McCloud's gun from the edge of the timber. And as McCloud breathed a sigh of thankfulness at having arrived in time to save the pelt for his wife and babes, the half-breed sprawled across the limp body of the silver fox.

Three friends sat at a table in a restaurant. Anderson was looking at the photograph of a savage princess that Carpenter had handed him.

"You're a cynic, Carpenter," he said. "Always comparing civilized men with savages, and even with animals."

"It's interesting to note a certain similarity of basic impulses all the way down the line," the explorer remarked. "I don't contend that the resemblance goes deeper than that. Of course we're millions of years removed from animals, and ages advanced beyond

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savagery. Besides, you've reversed the point I was trying to make. Don't get me wrong. I don't argue that civilized men are either animals or savages, but that there is some little good in wild men and some strangely human qualities in many four-footed beasts. See what I mean?"

"You can't argue one way without the argument applying equally the other," Flick stated. "I don't agree with you."

"You insist on mistaking my point," the explorer repeated. The furrier took the picture of the savage princess from Anderson. "She certainly loved to adorn her young self with baubles," he observed. "I suppose her royal parents plundered the countryside to keep her supplied with trinkets."

The explorer nodded.

"But Alluana wasn't such a bad sort of a princess after all," he said as he recalled some of her princely virtues.

A young girl moved majestically between the tables, and the furrier unconsciously contrasted Arline Carlton with the picture of the princess Alluana. The costume of each was evidence that parental love had showered her with the choicest treasures to be obtained. Instead of the copper anklets of the dusky princess, Arline wore platinum and diamond circlets on her wrists; the nose ring of Alluana was replaced by pendants dangling from Arline's ears; the fantastic headpiece of peacock plumes was eclipsed by the feather that trailed above Arline's lovely head; a glittering bar-pin reposed over

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her heart in the exact spot where the picture revealed a tin dinner-plate gleaming proudly on Alluana's breast; and instead of a leopard skin about the middle—twin pelts of silver fox were loosely clasped about the shoulders of Arline.

"It is only natural," said the explorer, "that in the course of a thousand generations styles should change."

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EARLY observers have stated that there were other general movements in the short grass country far outweighing in significance the twice-yearly drift of the buffalo herds across the plains, that it is a fact that everything which was part of the Kansas prairies had been on the move for twenty years; and there is much to substantiate these assertions. Even to-day the Arkansas River shifts and cuts new channels in the sands. The taller prairie grass is reputed to have pushed westward across the plains, overlapping the short matted buffalo-grass, its advance averaging four miles a year; to-day, under the influence of the westward-moving rain-belt, the cultivated field has outdistanced both and has obliterated all evidence of this earlier advance. Timber has claimed the stream-beds, and the view across the country reveals an unending expanse of alternating fields and groves, where fifty years ago a single gnarled cottonwood was a landmark noted from Newton to Las Animas, and men referred to Lone Tree Spring as frequently as they mentioned Pike's Peak when designating distance or direction. In seasons of strong standing winds the

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sandhill country still moves as of old, the white blow-sand trickling in little streams from the higher points, reforming about some object that retards its onward sweep, settling round the bleached bones of a winter-killed cow or drifting thick in the shelter of a plum thicket, building a new dune and changing the topography of the stunted hills—everything on the move.

It was many years after the pioneers first noted these curious changes that Fleet, the young pronghorn buck, witnessed still another movement that was perhaps even more significant than the rest. Fleet was a yearling buck, content with his lot in life. He was bedded on a slight rise of ground. From this prominence the surface dipped shallowly away to end in a similar little swell that flanked the opposite side of the depression four miles to the north. The view in all other directions was similar, and on each rise a few antelope appeared.

Fleet had known no other land, for the pronghorn does not ordinarily stray far from familiar scenes, and Fleet's home range was confined within a radius of fifty miles from where he was stationed. But on this, his second spring, the pronghorn nation had shattered tradition. Many bands had formerly ranged to the east of him, holding out against the advance of the settlers, but these were now giving up the fight against field and fence, and the remnants of the bands were moving into the west. For months they had been coming, reaching Fleet's range and faring on.

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A drove of thirty antelope appeared and came toward him. He rose to view this curious spectacle, for in addition to being strangers who had forsaken their own home range, they were traveling in mixed company, a mingling of all ages and sexes at a season when the pronghorn tribe should have been divided into three separate groups—old bucks off by themselves, young bucks and does together, and old does with their newborn kids. The little band bedded in a flat and rested. An hour later they resumed the march, halting on each rise to look back to the east. That was the last bunch that migrated through Fleet's range, and thereafter the antelope was mostly a rumor east of Syracuse and only a memory east of Dodge.

This general exodus was occasioned by another broad movement, a rush of squatters for land that had heretofore been looked upon as fit only for grazing cows, and this rush in turn was occasioned by fresh evidence that the rain-belt was moving west.

Precipitation had been heavy beyond precedent the previous fall, and the winter snows had been soft and sheltering. The range was green, rank with new grass. Water stood in the depressions, and low-flying swarms of ducks and geese winged northward across this land that a few years past had been an arid desert. And with this reclaiming moisture came hopeful nesters to fence and farm the range. There had been preceding waves such as this, an influx of squatters in periods of bountiful rains, some of them leaving when drouth days

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came again, some always remaining, the next wave overlapping the last by fifty miles when Nature smiled once more.

Fleet observed three old bucks on a distant swell of ground. They had risen from their beds, and he caught the danger-sign. The antelope has a signal system of his own. The white rump patch is made up of long stiff hairs which bristle when he is excited or alarmed and the sun strikes a spark from the glistening hair. It was the system of pronghorn wig-wagging which was largely responsible for the survival of Fleet's tribe a quarter of a century after the last buffalo had been shot down on the plains.

The young buck rose and stamped excitedly, looking off in the direction of the three old veterans, his own rump-patch ruffling in sympathy even though the cause of the excitement was not within his own field of view. Behind him others took it up, flashing the signal on from band to band that menace lurked off to the east.

A white spot pitched into view on the far flat horizon, and a prairie schooner lumbered up a wide shallow valley, coming to a halt some three miles from Fleet's stand. His telescopic eyes took in every detail of the scene. The man picketed out the horses where the grass was good, first watering them at a brackish pond. A woman and a smaller figure moved in and out of the wagon. Smoke rose from the stovepipe which protruded from the wagon top as the wife prepared the evening meal. Night shut down across the plains, and Fleet kept his eye trained on the dull glow that

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illuminated the canvas walls of the wagon. With the first light of morning his interest was roused afresh. The woman moved about as she had the previous day, but the man and the smaller figure were nowhere in sight.

Fleet gave a whistling snort and stamped excitedly as his eye detected movement three-quarters of a mile away in a direct line between himself and the wagon. He pranced a few steps toward the spot, and the dozen or so young pronghorns that made up the band wheeled in behind him.

The movement came again, a slow limp lifting of some shapeless object from between two mounds of a prairie-dog village in the flats, then a soft settling back to level. The shrill cachinnations of excited prairie dogs announced that the village was roused to an unusual pitch. Fleet's curiosity flared, and he started off for a better view, not straight for the object which excited his suspicion but in a wide curve that would carry him past it about the same distance, enabling him to train his powerful eyes on the spot from a different angle. After a half-mile he stopped and wheeled in to face the point, the other young pronghorns lining up beside him.

The limp flapping was no more distinct from here and he dashed off once more, followed by his band, making another quarter turn before halting for a second look. Four times he repeated this maneuver, completing a wide circle. When he arrived near the point from which he had started, he was three hundred yards nearer

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the spot. Every movement in the dog town sent him off in a mad dash for a better view. Each circle lessened the distance by a few hundred yards.

From distant points of vantage old does were bristling and flashing the danger sign, but Fleet had never before been flagged, and curiosity rose above fear in him. Between the two mounds in the dog town a ten-year-old boy lay flat on his back, a saddle blanket covering him, and at two-minute intervals he raised his knees slowly, then lowered them again. Fleet's circle was now only six hundred yards from the queer moving shape. The dog holes in its immediate vicinity were apparently deserted, but those at some distance teemed with life, a dog on every mound, others moving swiftly from one to the next, the ratchet-like barking kept up without a break.

Fleet dashed past a plum thicket six hundred yards up-wind from the point of movement. There came a series of rapid flaps from between the two mounds, and he stopped to view this unusual agitation, wheeling to face it, stamping his forefeet. The other young prong-horns wheeled with him.

A puff of white smoke spurted from the little clump of stunted plum brush. A hot twinge of pain seared across Fleet's throat as a report silenced the chattering from the dog town; he heard a thud as a heavy ball struck the doe next him. She made two stiff bounds and pitched down, a soft-nose through her lungs. The band dashed off at top speed, huddled together for protection.

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The reports rolled in swift succession from the plum clump, the heavy slugs ripping through the close-packed ranks of the herd. One after another fell out, tumbling end over end. Five went down. Then Fleet and the rest were out of range—and the squatter had meat in camp.

As Fleet ran, a tiny trickle of blood dripped from the slight crease across his throat and spattered his breast and forelegs. He worked westward; and by noon of the following day, he had arrived at the extreme edge of his range. Squatters were there before him. It seemed that a white-topped wagon had followed every valley. In the main the families lived under canvas, but a goodly number had built sod or 'dobe huts.

The character of the country was somewhat different in this far edge of his territory; there were fewer expanses of smooth grasslands, greater profusion of stunted sage and greasewood, vast stretches of bare soil almost devoid of vegetation—the junction of the sage country and the short-grass plains. Fleet bedded at last in a broad flat that was shared by another band, its personnel evidencing the fact that new conditions had upset the established customs of the pronghorn tribe, for here in early spring the yearlings of both sexes were traveling with old does and their kids.

After an hour of rest Fleet's muscles stiffened. He lay motionless except for an occasional lifting of his head to peer at the slender thread of smoke that rose from a sod hut far across the flat. Two shapes moved toward him, and he regarded them intently but fell

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asleep once more after identifying them as two prowling coyotes.

The two prairie wolves moved through the scattered band of antelope. The old does had cached their kids, and the youngsters made no move, blending well with their surroundings. The foraging coyotes were intent upon locating an isolated kid which they might kill by a sudden rush and escape before the enraged mother could reach the spot. Then later, after the band had moved, they could return to the feast. Does with kids moved over near their offspring as they sighted the maurauding pair.

The dog-coyote paused, one forefoot uplifted, and nosed the wind as a shift of breeze carried the warm blood-scent to his nostrils. He traced the ribbon of scent upwind and located Fleet. The she-wolf followed her mate, and Fleet looked up from his nap to see the coyotes sitting on their haunches fifty yards away, eyeing him hungrily. If they could cut the wounded buck out of the band, they could wear him down.

They haunted the vicinity for an hour, moving occasionally, one or the other curling up for a nap while the mate stood watch. Then fate favored them. A squatter's wagon rolled across the flat a mile or more to the south. The rest of the antelope band swept away for a better view.

Fleet rose to his feet but found himself stiff and sore, and so he resumed his bed. Fifty yards from him a yearling doe had risen lamely. She was small even for a yearling doe antelope, a late-dropped kid of the sum-

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mer past, slender-boned, clean-cut and trim. Since earliest infancy Trim had known Fleet as leader of the band of young pronghorns to which she belonged. She was worn from the long journey, and when the young buck resumed his bed she moved a few steps toward him instead of following the rest, stood for a moment looking after them, then bedded down.

The coyotes drew in to within thirty feet of Fleet. The dog sat on his haunches, his tongue lolling out as he grinned at the victim while the she-wolf trotted nervously back and forth. The dog made a silent rush for Fleet, and the young buck bounced up to face him, snorting and stamping his forefeet. Inch by inch the dog sidled toward him but whisked away as the pronghorn leaped for him and struck out viciously with the sharp cutting hoofs. The she-wolf darted in on him from behind, intent on slicing a hamstring, but swerved in her rush as Fleet whirled to meet her with his punishing feet. For more than an hour they kept up this team-work, luring the buck to exhaust himself by short violent rushes while they conserved their own strength. His muscles failed to respond with their usual snap. The she-wolf departed at last to nurse the pups denned a mile away, but the grizzled old dog gave Fleet no rest.

When the mate returned, the worrying was resumed. A wounded antelope would soon be worn down. But Fleet's wound was merely a scratch. The exertion limbered up his stiffened muscles, and instead of weakening he grew more active. He was heartily sick

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of this baiting, and fled in long graceful leaps, the two coyotes hanging grimly on in the chase, their gait a smooth, sliding wolf glide and apparently effortless. Fleet turned once to strike at the dog. Again the she-wolf sidled in behind him. As he turned to run again, there sounded the tap of dainty hoofs bounding along behind him. Trim had watched the fight without concern, but an antelope, loving company, is panic-stricken at finding itself alone. Fleet was the only antelope in sight, and when he fled, she had risen from her bed and followed.

Fleet whirled to strike at the dog-coyote as the old warrior snagged at a hamstring. As the coyote darted back, the little doe rose in a twenty-foot bound, and her battering hoofs came down on his rump. He regained his feet and started off, one hip sagging limply, only to be crushed by the full weight of the buck as Fleet drove all four feet into him.

Time after time the she-coyote rushed the two prong-horns to distract their attention from her mate, but her charges were met with flying hoofs, and always they returned to the dog that was trying gamely to drag himself away. The old coyote played the game without a whimper, went down under the sharp hoofs without a sound, writhing round with his last ounce of strength trying to sink his teeth in the feet that struck him.

Rage seethed in Fleet, and he battered the still form into a shapeless pulp. From a little distance the she-wolf watched helplessly, knowing that further intervention was entirely useless. The sun dipped behind



"Writhing round with his last ounce of strength trying to sink his teeth in the feet that struck him."

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the hills to the west as Fleet made one last leap and bounced upon the mauled coyote with all four feet. Then he trotted proudly to the crest of a little wave of ground, Trim following close to his flank. They watched another family of nesters making camp far out across the flat, the scene barely visible in the waning light, and from behind them came the lonesome call of a she coyote for the mate who could not answer.

The ground near the rise was choppy and broken, cut and crisscrossed by washes and wind cracks. For a week the two pronghorns lingered there unmolested. Squatters came day after day but avoided the breaks near the ridge. There were no other antelope in sight on the big flat. Twice Fleet saw tiny sparks in the sunlight, the flashes of alarmed antelope catching his eyes from miles across the plains. These came from the crests of ridges showing above the intervening waves of ground. The faint reports of rifle shots reached his ears, drifting across the flats from great distances, but there was no shooting close at hand.

The settlers in the flat came to know Fleet and Trim, the two pringhorns that ranged alone, ten miles from others of their kind. The rains held, and the desert bloomed under the softening touch. There were sod huts at three-mile intervals all through the low country. The squatters were too busy to hunt where meat was scarce, two wary antelope the only possible quarry within many miles. Fleet saw curious long lines of slender stakes round the edges of these fields, the fence-posts showing only as tiny rods in the distance, and he

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had no knowledge of what they were or of the part they were playing in wiping his tribe from the plains.

As the summer advanced, a few scattering antelope drifted in from time to time, driven on from some other range, and joined Fleet and Trim. By August there were ten of them. They held more to the broken country, avoiding the green patches and long lines of stakes near the sod houses of men. And now, with ten antelope where there had been but two, the nesters had a far better chance of securing game. Three meat-hungry settlers planned to bag the little herd.

At daybreak of a clear August morning Fleet noted a movement which was new to him. Three times in as many minutes a red object flipped upward from the banks of a wash some distance from his stand. Every antelope in the band was tense and watchful. At the fourth appearance Fleet was off, followed by the rest. He would never be flagged but once. It was known to the settlers that practically every pronghorn on the plains had seen at least one evidence of the danger of inquisitiveness during the past year, that fear had replaced curiosity concerning queer and unnatural movements on the range; so this flagging was but a tentative trial, only the first move of the meat-hunt.

All three of the men were experienced hunters and knew well another weakness of the pronghorn. The antelope, lover of his home range, does not flee directly away from his enemies but chooses a course at right angles to the source of danger, curving slightly back toward it as he runs. If this course was followed

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throughout, it would resolve into a circle of from twenty to forty miles in circumference. Old plainsmen say that this trait rises from the fear that a straight-away course would carry the pronghorn out of his home range and away from familiar landmarks, and that it persists from force of habit even after he has been forced to migrate far from the land that saw his birth.

The red object lay due north of Fleet, and the young buck headed straight west, curving almost imperceptibly to the north. The man with the flag dashed from the coulee on a horse and gave chase, not with the hope of overtaking the band, but to startle the pronghorns and settle them into steady flight. Five miles back of him two men sat their horses on a rise of ground. They saw the tiny white specks move westward, and without hesitation they urged their horses in the same direction, separating as one veered his mount a trifle to the north.

Fleet did not exert his full energy. The following horseman was not pressing him hard and was forced to slow down in crossing cut-bank draws of over twelve feet in width, while the pronghorns skimmed over the yawning gaps without apparent effort. The northward curve was intensified, and Fleet slowed down as the horseman was distanced. Then he made out a running horse bearing down a long smooth bench on a course that would intersect his own.

It was foreign to Fleet's nature to turn or twist. His reliance was mainly placed in two things, wonderful eyes to detect approaching danger and the speed to

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outrun it, and once settled on a course of flight few things could make him deviate from his chosen route. So Fleet put on speed. The horse was running smoothly and with a fair chance of heading him. It did not occur to Fleet to double back and leave danger behind him; instead, he exerted every ounce of driving power in a desperate attempt to cross ahead of the flying horse. He had a bare hundred yards to spare when the man pulled up his horse in a few stiff jumps and swung from the saddle.

There was no huddled bunch of frightened antelope for a target. Each one had put his best into the final spurt, and their endurance and speed were varied. They streamed past in scattered formation, individual targets skimming by like flitting shadows. The man emptied his gun. It was hard shooting, and he drew only two victims out of the band.

The pronghorns held their course. A mile farther on, one of the lines of stakes which Fleet had so often seen of late loomed just ahead of him. Beyond it a horseman was boring swiftly down to cut his trail. Again he put on speed. As he neared the line of stakes he observed slender strands stretched horizontally from one post to the next. Fleet had spent his life on the open plains. He could jump across wide cracks with the greatest ease, but never had he been forced to clear an obstacle by leaping over it. The muscular action required for this feat was unknown to him. The slender strands did not appear formidable and in his

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panic-stricken rush to pass ahead of the horse he darted straight into them without slackening speed.

There was a heavy blow on his breast, a hiss, and the next instant he was roll long end over end, carried on by the momentum developed before he struck the wire. Other shapes were bouncing near him, and he rolled ten yards before he regained his feet. As he ran on, there was a sharp pain in his chest, a ragged tear just above the junction of legs and body; one foreleg was badly wrenched from the fall.

The only thing that had saved his life was the fact that two other pronghorns had hit the wire at the same instant, and the strand had parted under the combined impact. Three pronghorns passed Fleet, others remaining behind, for the wire had taken its toll. One young buck twitched on the ground, his throat gashed nearly to the bone by the wire he had struck with all his weight and speed. Two others scrambled on after the rest, each with a foreleg wrenched sidewise till it dangled and flopped at every step. A fourth lay motionless, the head doubled back under the body, its neck broken as effectually as by the blow of an ax. The man shot down the two cripples and turned his attention to Fleet, who lagged behind the rest. Twice the balls ripped through the sage tips within a foot of him. The third scored a streak along his ribs. He struggled along after Trim and the other two does, who were all that remained of the band of ten.

The three does held tenaciously to the original course,

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curving slightly north of west, and at last halted, after completing half a wide circle, stationing themselves on a crest some fifteen miles due north of the spot where the meat hunters had jumped them at daybreak. Two hours later Fleet limped up to their stand.

For a month the four survivors ranged a limited strip of rather broken country. North of them toward the railroad the surface was rough and rolling, with only a few small valleys that had tempted the settlers. Fleet found more antelope here, and as he worked gradually northward, he found still more, mostly in little bands, and once his trail crossed that of forty old does with their kids. Water-holes were widely scattered here, and the settlers had thrown out long drift-fences in chosen directions.

There was one fence running fifteen miles in a straight line east and west, a single water-hole just north of the center. This kept the cows of the man who had settled there from drifting south, and they would not travel far enough from water to round the ends of the drift-fence, but grazed fanwise northward from the water-hole and so rendered it an easy matter to hold them.

This fence played a large part in Fleet's development and education. After a month in the locality a lone horseman jumped the four antelope. His interest in them was slight, and he scarcely gave them a glance, but the fear in Fleet was no less intense. He darted off in his usual curving flight, only to discover that he was bearing directly down upon the drift-fence. As he

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neared it, the fear of wire fences surged over him with the memory of that other day, and for the first time in his life he dodged, twisting back from the dreaded wire. Thereafter the young buck, having once broken away from set habit, learned to double and turn to avoid danger with as much readiness as other game.

Later the fence taught him another useful thing. Twice when wishing to cross from one point to another the fence had interfered. He had gone down on his knees and crawled under the lower wire. The third time he sized it up and bounced over the top strand, clearing it with ease, the first time in his life he had ever leaped over an obstacle. From that moment on Fleet was fence-wise and feared the long lines of wire and posts not at all.

During the late summer five young does joined the little band. In early fall the pronghorn tribe held to its usual custom of gathering in great droves. For fifty miles round they gathered, drifting together till there were almost two hundred of all ages and sexes in one big band—the last time this was ever seen on the plains. The previous fall, while Fleet had still followed his mother, the band of which he was a part had numbered five hundred head.

For two full years Nature had smiled on that section of the semi-desert where the short grass meets the sage. Rain had soaked the range in summer, and the winters had been mild. As if to make amends for this unusual gentleness, the gods of the elements sent early cold waves across the plains. Bitter frosts prevailed, and

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for months the mercury seldom showed above the zero mark. Howling gales shrieked across the flats and drove the cold to the very bones of all living things, and with it all there was no redeeming moisture. The few snows that fell came as fine shot driven ahead of the wind with such velocity that it evaporated from its own force, leaving the range dry as dust once the storm had passed.

The settlers had little to do but hunt, and the big droves of antelope that had gathered were harried day after day. North of Fleet's range the pronghorns were hauled into Las Animas in wagons piled high with frozen meat. East across the Kansas line the same slaughter was going on, and the inhabitants of Coolidge and Syracuse wintered on "slow veal."

Through two months of this persecution the herd with which Fleet ranged hung together from ancient custom, but there came a day in January when a big meat-hunt was on, every settler for twenty miles around taking part in it. When the day was over, the drove had been broken up into little bands, and never again would there be a pronghorn gathering in the land where a few years past it had been no unusual sight to see a thousand in a bunch.

The settlers were elated at the success of the carefully planned hunt which had netted forty head. Old timers of the early days of Dodge compared the slaughter to the old buffalo days when the hide hunters operated out of 'Dobe Walls.

Fleet's new-found knowledge of doubling and twist-

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ing on his trail saved him many times before spring, and the little band of does that followed him benefited from his wisdom. Spring broke dry and hot, a clean jump from winter cold to summer heat with no intervening days of smiling weather. He failed to draw away by himself as was the custom when the does were mothering their kids. Instead he led the band as before. There were two yearling bucks, eight does and a dozen spring kids in the lot, the largest drove within a hundred miles.

There came a brief respite in the general cannonading of the antelope tribe while the settlers were busy putting in their crops. Then they hunted for meat and waited for the rains that never came. Meat secured from the band led by Fleet was meat well earned, for by now the wary buck had broken away from all customs which had made his kind easy victims to the wiles of man. He could not be flagged. He no longer fled along some chosen route, affording an opportunity for outlying riders to come within range. High points from which his telescopic eyes could sweep a vast expanse of country were the only spots where he felt secure. Settlers could see the white dots on lofty knolls or open ridges for many miles, but found it increasingly difficult to get within gunshot of the little herd.

From these points of vantage Fleet watched the course of events, the march of the summer of terrible drouth that dulled hope and ambition in the hearts of the settlers. Hot winds seared the range, and the water-holes dried up. Depressions which had been

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miniature marshes from a surplus of rainwater the summer before were now glaring chalky expanses, blighted by the white alkali sucked to the surface by standing water.

Fleet did not miss the rains. He needed but little water. A few tiny springs among the rocks which supplied a few spoonfuls at a time served his needs as well as a brimming river. The bawling of parched range-stock sounded day and night. Every sidehill that showed a green spot to mark a trickling seepage from the rocks was trampled flat by the frantic pawing of thirsty cows in a desperate search for water. The range was dotted with carcasses drying under the blazing sun.

Mid-August came, with the settlers praying for early fall rains. Fleet stood one day on a knoll. Three miles away a sunbonneted figure moved in a plum thicket, a settler's wife gathering the little sandhill plums for food. Heat waves danced and wavered, lending an appearance of continual motion to the landscape, playing queer tricks to the vision. Distant cows were magnified, a mirage effect that showed them standing on the far side of a wide marsh with indeterminate shore-lines.

A few sluggish puffs of wind sprang up to relieve the torrid calm, but there was no freshness in the breezes. Instead they were shriveling hot blasts. The puffs settled into a steady wind increasing in force till all unattached articles were sucked up and shot across the

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baked flats with tremendous velocity. In an hour Fleet saw the beginning of another of the queer general movements of the plains.

Within a radius of ten miles from the height of ground on which he stood, the home sites of perhaps a half-dozen settlers were visible, and from each one of these a low muddy cloud streamed downwind. The plowed fields of the squatters were on the move. The soft earth, loosened and pulverized by cultivation and deprived of the original sheltering stand of sage and grass, was literally blown away. For ten days the wind tore across the plains and drove all before it. The air was murky, a haze of fine dust obscuring distant objects.

Sand and gravel, flying flat and straight before the level drive of the gale, stung Fleet's eyes and nostrils, but his discomfort was small compared to the distress in the ranks of the helpless range-stock. Huge tumbleweeds raced past, scudding phantoms in the dust-clouds, a never-ending procession driven up from the south. Before the storm had passed, the loosened soil in every field was whittled down to hardpan. Down-wind from them the dislodged particles settled in a fine film over the range, drifting as snow and piling deep in the plum thickets and heavier clumps of sage. The flying tumbleweeds matted along the fences and formed wind-breaks over which the sand drifted till only the tops of the posts were visible.

When at last the wind subsided, Fleet once more saw as far as his eye could reach, the white spots that were

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the wagons of the settlers moving across the plains—but this time they were moving eastward. All through eastern Colorado and across the Kansas line for more than a hundred miles discouraged settlers were converging toward one central line. A continuous procession filed back eastward on the old Santa Fé Trail through Coolidge, Syracuse and Dodge. Old men compared the sight to the old-time ox-bows of the bull-trains that had once traveled that same historic trail. Three times in as many decades they had seen this hopeful invasion in periods of rainfall, three times the discouraged retreat before the blight of the drouth. But each succeeding wave had seen the reclamation of a strip fifty miles or more farther west.

In the fall there was but one family on Fleet's range for every three that had called it home the previous spring, but this outpouring of humanity, seeking more friendly climes, failed to retard the extermination of the pronghorn kind. The contrary was true, for the remaining settlers hunted them incessantly for meat.

Fleet met fewer bands of antelope, and these droves were small, averaging less than ten head to the bunch. Day after day Fleet's band was forced to shift, fleeing before some ambitious hunter, and as he moved back and forth across his range, he noted that the numbers of the other little herds were diminishing. He frequently glimpsed little groups of two or three pronghorns stationed on the highest point of ground in their vicinity, one standing guard while the others fed or slept.

Trim was always near him. She was the only

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survivor of the band of does that had ranged with him on the big flat to the south the preceding spring. Since fate had decreed that old customs be abandoned and that the bucks should run with the does throughout the year instead of segregating themselves as formerly, the little doe seldom strayed far from Fleet. Perhaps there were ties of old memories to bind her to him, perhaps only her reliance in the wary buck's ability to lead her safely through all the perils of the range. When they fed or rested, Trim stationed herself a few feet from the leader; and when they fled from danger, she ran close to his flank.

Fleet's black pronged horns loosened close to his skull, and the shakiness of his headgear irritated him to a point where he shook his head savagely a score of times a day in his attempt to rid himself of the nuisance. In midwinter the loose members were shed; yet he still had horns, for the pronghorn does not shed the entire growth at the burr as do the elk and deer, to be later replaced by a velvet growth. It was only the outer husk of his horns that were shed, pushed up from his skull by the pointed, hairy core that in the pronghorn is the substitute for the velvet growth of the annual shedders of the antlered tribes. This tough core hardened and grew, the finished horn with its forward-sprouting prong being heavier and of greater size than the last.

The drove which Fleet led was the largest within many miles, and of natural consequence the sought-for prize of every hunting settler. His band had fared

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rather better than the rest through his having abandoned every dangerous custom of his kind and so upsetting the calculations of the men who counted upon fixed habits when gunning for antelope. But it was not in the nature of things that the drove should winter without casualties. Clever stalkers twice drew within gunshot and took their heavy toll.

Trim drew away by herself in March, but this pilgrimage was only for a single day instead of the lengthy duration of the old-time segregation of the mothering does. She returned to Fleet followed by twin kids. Every doe was now handicapped by one or more dependent offspring. These little ones were cached between spells of nursing, and the does were compelled to desert them when men drew near, as the newborn kids were unable to follow at any effective speed. Always the does returned for their young, and the wily hunters benefited by this urge which called the mothers back to the spot from which they had been jumped.

Somewhere in the semi-desert of eastern Colorado the bones of a dozen pronghorn kids, sons and daughters of Fleet, mark the identical spots where their mothers cached them that spring—mothers who sacrificed their own lives by attempting to return for their young. The rest learned to return only at night. One night in May Trim slipped back to a ridge from which a hunter had driven them at noon. One kid lay motionless, exactly as she had left it. The other twin had

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disappeared, a prey to prowling coyotes. All through the night she sought for it without avail.

The mothers were thin and gaunt, worn by this double exertion at nursing time, the long flights and perilous returns. When the kids were three months old, they could follow. They lacked the speed and endurance of their elders, but could distance all ordinary pursuers.

Even relaying failed to bring Fleet to bag. Many an antelope has fallen victim to the sport of relaying—men stationed here and there on fresh horses to take up the chase; for the little speedsters of the plains, possessed of incredible speed for short spurts, had not the endurance to sustain their gait on long runs, and when relayed by good horses were easily worn down and roped. But Fleet was no easy subject for this method of hunting, for he no longer forged ahead on a chosen course regardless of all else. He had learned to double and dodge with the readiness of the tricky coyote.

Eventually a new menace appeared on his range and forced him to sever the last tie that linked him with old habits of his kind. The fame of the wary buck with the wire-cut on his breast had spread. Fifty miles from his range a settler owned a pack of coursing dogs, great wolfhounds that could outrun a coyote on the open flats, overhaul the darting swifts and the long-eared jacks of the plains. He rode over into Fleet's territory to try out his dogs on the pronghorn buck.

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A second summer of hot winds and drouth was well advanced. Fleet was stationed on a high ridge that afforded a view for many miles each way. He roused from his nap to see Trim peering off at some distant specks that caused her rump patch to bristle and flash in the sunlight. A group of five horsemen rode towards him. Fleet rose and watched them come. When they were within two miles of him, the buck turned and fled, followed by the rest of the band. He ran easily and exerted no great speed.

The instant the antelope had disappeared over the sky line, the riders lifted their horses into a keen run and headed for the ridge. As they topped it, one man slipped the leashes of four hounds, and the chase was on.

Fleet saw the running horses pouring down the gentle slope a mile or so behind him, and he put on a trifle more speed. For another three miles he held the gait and was drawing away from them without effort, conserving his strength for a spurt in event of others being stationed ahead of him. A single high-pitched, eager yelp drew his attention to four smaller figures bearing down on him. He knew these for dogs, the creatures of man, for the yapping curs of settlers had often followed him.

He put on more speed, but still the four dogs gained. Faint and far through the still air the wild cheers of men reached his ears as they encouraged the hounds. He soon learned that the dogs that followed him now were not the slow, stupid creatures he had known, but

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stern killers, long-coupled and capable of tremendous speed. Notch by notch he increased the pace until at last he was covering the ground at a rate which seemed impossible for any other living thing to equal.

Fifteen terrified pronghorns had flattened out into a terrific run and were speeding with him, but the four killers were gaining inch by inch. The pace broke the hearts of the kids. One by one they fell behind. Two dropped flat and lay motionless while the hounds, coursers that ran wholly by sight, swept on past them, where a dog of keener scent would have stopped and ferreted them out. The next pair fell behind but struggled on. Fleet heard two keen, eager yelps as the dogs forged on to the kill. The next instant four giant hounds tore down the two kids and mauled them.

An hour after dusk Fleet led his herd back over the course; and two frightened kids rejoined the band. For three consecutive days Fleet ran ahead of the grim hounds and the cheering men. Each day the dogs made one or more kills. On the third night when they traveled back, Trim's one remaining kid failed to rejoin them.

The little doe held very near to the leader. When the men returned to the hunt next day, they scoured the country with glasses from every commanding knob, but no distant antelope flashes rewarded their search.

This new menace was something which Fleet could not combat. Doubling and dodging would avail him nothing, for the four great hounds were possessed of even greater speed than his own. Two hours before

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sunup he had led his little crew off southwest toward the rough masses of the hills.

He came to the big flat where he had ranged the spring before. This broad expanse constituted a shallow valley between the roughly rolling country toward the railroad and the first pitch of the hills. Many of the settlers had moved with the drouth, but the tongues of smoke gave evidence that man still inhabited some few of the scattered sod huts on the flats. Fleet rested on the crest of the rise that overlooked the bottoms, but only for a day, as his fear of the dogs amounted to sheer terror surpassing anything of the sort he had felt in the past. The hounds set at naught the one chief accomplishment on which he mainly relied—speed; and he wished to put all possible distance between himself and the spot where these terrors dwelt.

The following morning Fleet descended to the flats, and for hours he traveled across them straight for the Two Buttes that loomed as sentinels on the far side. The valley narrowed to pass between the knobs and he held on up the valley that led away into the hills. He turned aside and mounted the first slopes. An hour later two horsemen rode down the bottoms. A smaller speck followed them. Fleet trained his powerful eyes on this tiny dot and bristled. It was a dog! Without hesitation he led the way farther into the rough maze of the foothills.

Twice in the next two months Fleet saw other prong-horns on distant points of the hills that flanked the

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Picket Wire Cañon. A half-dozen times he returned to the edge of the low country. Each time he saw men and heard the distant barking of settlers' dogs, a sound which drove him back to the hills. On the last trip a trail-hound, useless in this new land, but still prized by his owner from former accomplishments in a timbered country, picked up the hot trail of the pronghorns and followed it with a prolonged bellowing that struck fear to their hearts. Fleet turned his back on the low country and headed deep into the breaks of the Picket Wire.

For six years the pronghorn buck with the wire-cut on his breast was never seen on the plains. The little band held its own through the years, and even increased. Fleet met the graceful deer in the foothills and adopted much the same mode of life. At times he returned to the edge of the hills, but never found the courage to go down into his native range, and on these trips he often heard faint sounds which he knew for the distant reports of rifles and shotguns out across the flats.

Men made wood roads back into the hills to get out the scattered wire and pines for firewood and the sturdy cedars for posts. These wood-cutters reported that the antelope had forsaken the plains and that the last few bunches were scattered through the hills; that they grazed on the cedar-studded sidehills and bedded on the rims of box canons much after the fashion of the deer, and that they had learned to jump over down-logs and

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rocks where formerly, when living on the treeless flats, they had been unable to clear an object of any considerable height.

Through all the years Fleet was a stranger in an alien land, and the longing for the wide plains was ever with him. The region which had been looked upon as a raw new country so short a time before had become an old country almost overnight. The rains had come again, and with them had come the settlers in greater numbers than before. The stone town of Coolidge, half deserted in the last exodus of settlers had never been repopulated as had the other towns along the Santa Fe Trail, and now it had all the appearance of a mediæval ruin, the limestone buildings windowless, the roofs sagging, standing isolated and alone, a monument to thwarted, dead ambitions.

Men were already speaking reminiscently of the old days and regretting—forty years too late—that the buffalo had been exterminated. But few of them gave a thought to the last straggling bands of pronghorns crowded back into an unnatural environment in the edge of the hills. The little speedsters had been a part of a past too recent to be considered in retrospect for at least another decade. Yet even then the pronghorn kind was in for worse straits than those of the lamented bison. A concerted movement had been launched to save the last of the shaggy monsters from extinction, but his smaller range-mate had been overlooked.

A few bands fed in the broad pastures of far-sighted cowmen who refused to allow others to shoot them

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down. In the deserts of Arizona, Nevada and New Mexico a few herds still held out, their numbers decreasing year by year. In the Northwest a few still lingered in Wyoming, Montana and across the line on the prairies of Alberta. But the day of the pronghorn had passed.

For two years Fleet had made his home back in the hills a score of miles from the low country. He was growing old, for the span of the pronghorn's life is not long, and he hungered for another glimpse of his native home. In the spring of his ninth year he led his followers northeast, and for a month they lingered behind the first tier of hills. Except for the occasional rattling of a wagon along a wood road, and the few cows that grazed on the barren slopes, there was little evidence of man. Distant rifle-shots no longer sounded from the low country, and it came to Fleet that perhaps the settlers had gone from his old home range. In the early evening of a clear day in May he led his little band out to the first roll of the hills for a view of the flats.

They stopped, huddled together and gazed down upon a strange sight. Fleet had often seen mirage effects on the plains, the heat-waves bringing imaginary lakes into being. Trim drew close to him and laid her muzzle across his saddle as they looked again upon what must be a wonderful mirage; for in the valley that lay behind Two Buttes a broad lake appeared, with the ranch houses of men beyond it, and cattle grazing placidly on the green shores.

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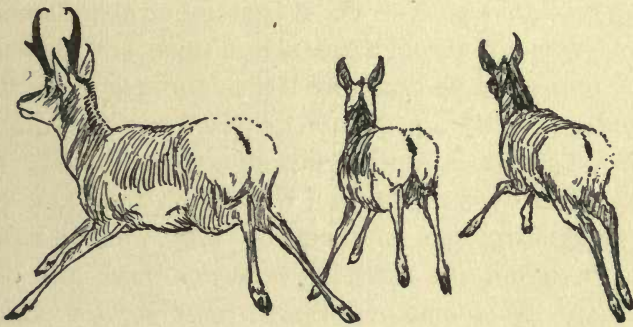
Fleet moved down the ridge that flanked the valley of visions, and the dozen pronghorns bunched closely as they stood on a point that overlooked the big flat. The sun hung low over the hills behind them, and Fleet bristled his rump patch and stamped as he peered off to the east. It seemed that the plains once more swarmed with pronghorns, for the slanting rays of the sun struck a hundred glinting sparks. As far as his eye could reach these antelope flashes greeted him, as if a whole nation of his kind looked off to the east and bristled the danger sign.

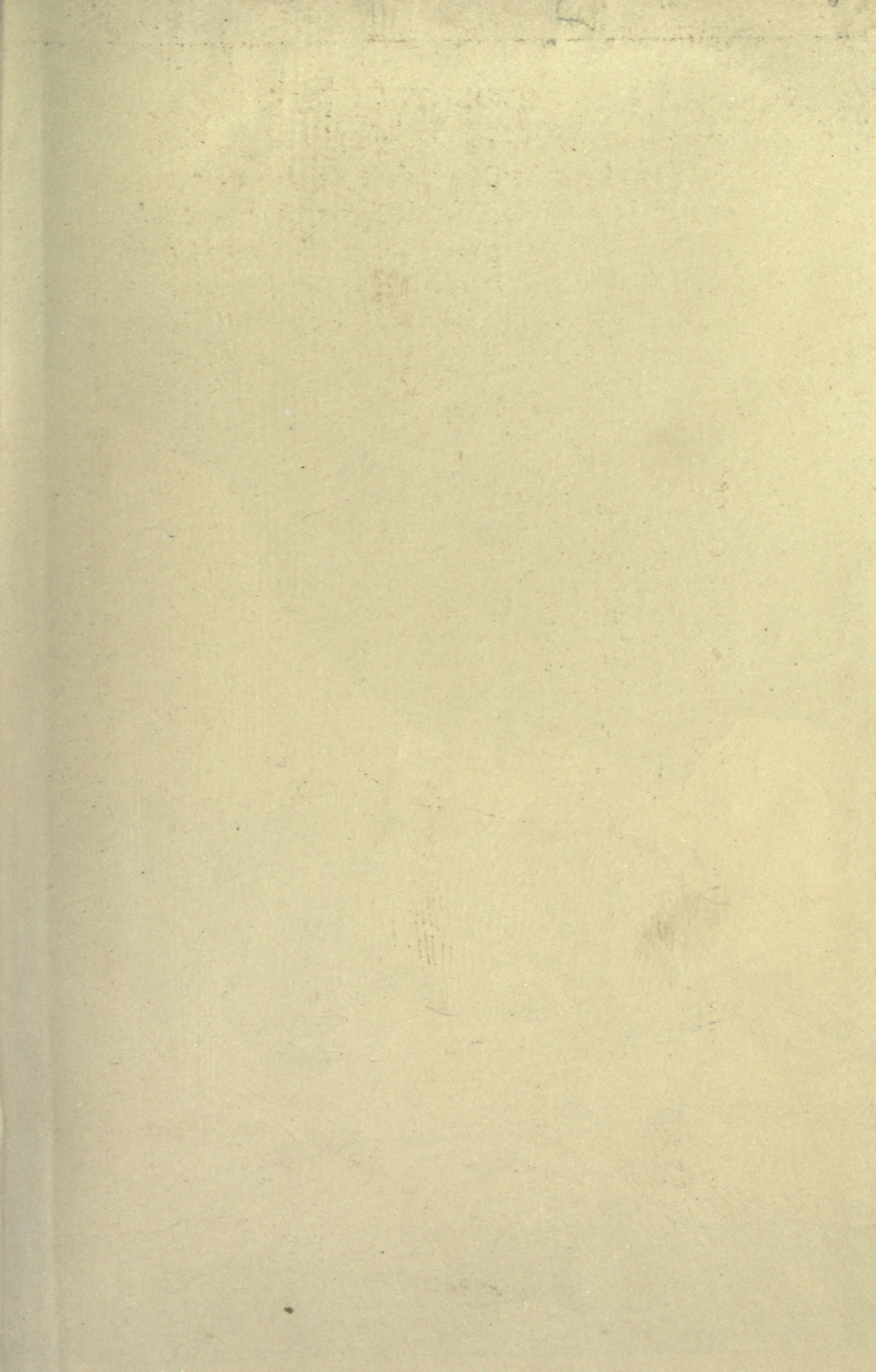
Then the sun pitched behind the hills, and he knew that danger had indeed come from the east, that he had read his signs wrong. The reason he had heard no rifle-shots was not through absence of men but from the fact that there was nothing left in the low country to shoot. In the queer afterglow that immediately follows sunset in deserts, distant objects loomed clear and distinct for a few brief moments after the fading of the glaring light of the sun. The antelope flashes had been but the dazzling reflection from the glass windows of a hundred houses that nestled among orderly cultivated fields.

Fleet had witnessed another general movement. Men had aided nature by driving artesian wells to water the desert wastes. Two Buttes valley had been dammed to hold back the flood waters of melting snows. The once nameless flat had seen a rush of settlers and was now the populous Artesia—a portion of the desert permanently reclaimed.

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There might be other general moves of even greater significance for man; but after gazing long, Fleet made the last move of any significance for the pronghorn tribe. The old buck turned away from his one-time stamping ground and led the antelope back to make their last stand in the breaks of the Picket Wire.





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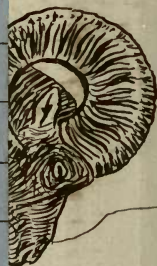
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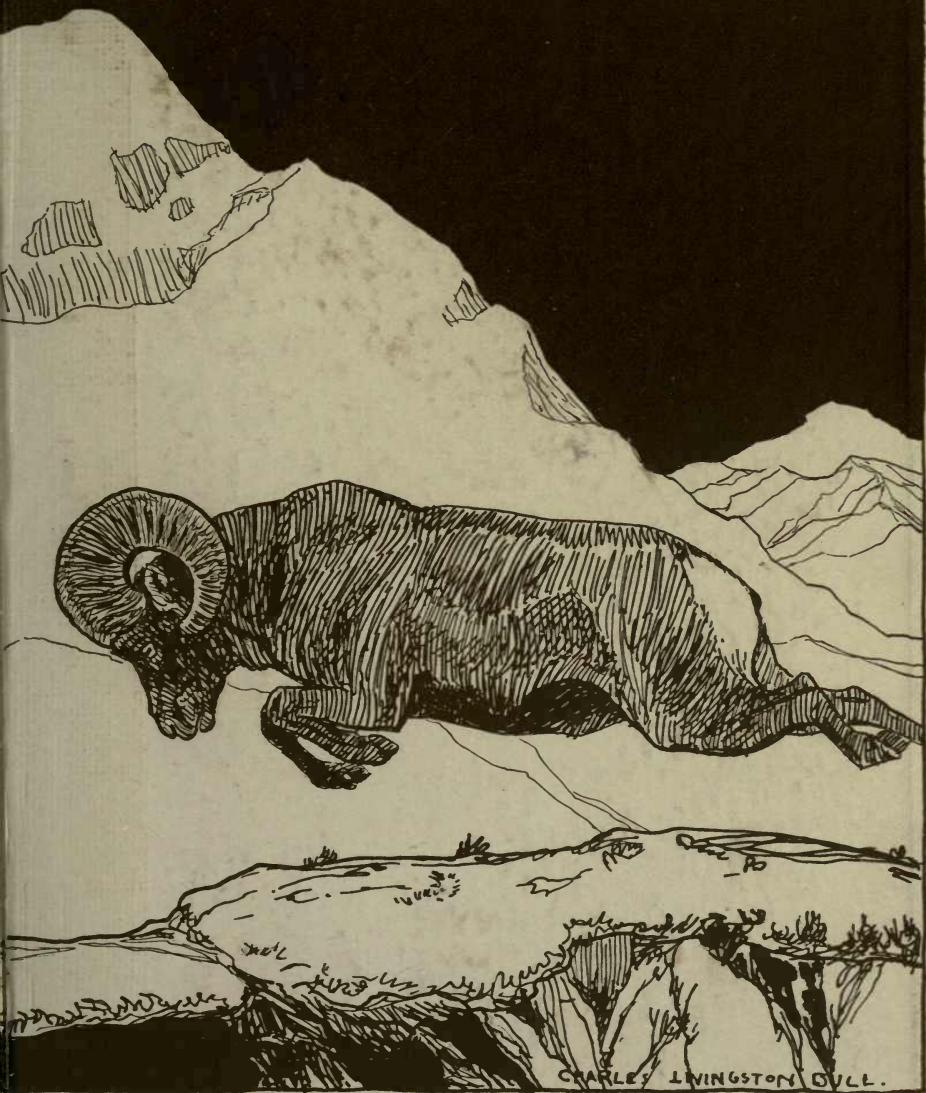
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